

Chapter 2

The Sacrament of Baptism

[*The Baptism of St. Augustine* by Domenico Bruschi]

In this assignment, students will engage with the art and cultural traditions of the Church, especially in relation to the Sacrament of Baptism. This assignment will require audio and visual equipment. The goal of the assignment is to help the students reflect more deeply on their experience of the sacraments and some of the principles of Catholic sacramental theology. Share the following information with the students in your own words:

Beneath the *duomo* (cathedral) of Milan, there are the archaeological remains of an ancient “baptistery” – a small building built for the purpose of celebrating baptisms. A picture of that baptistery can be found here (it might be good to display during this discussion):

[https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q3636814#/media/File:Baptistery_of_San_Giovanni alle_Fonti_3r.jpg.]

After a lifetime of wandering, St. Augustine – who came from a town called Hippo in North Africa – converted to Christianity in the year 386 A.D. A major part of his conversion experience was listening to the homilies of St. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan in northern Italy. (Imagine a homily being that good!) At the Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday, 387 A.D., St. Ambrose baptized St. Augustine in the baptistery of Milan.

According to an ancient tradition, while Ambrose was baptizing Augustine, both men were overcome with joy. The Holy Spirit inspired them to start singing, and they spontaneously sang the words together of the hymn we now know as the *Te Deum*: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/the-te-deum.html>. (Play this recording of the *Te Deum* before going on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-w-LgChYCKU>)

In the early Church, baptisms were done by “full immersion” and most people were baptized as adults. The baptismal font was big, the size of a small swimming pool, and the bishop would go down into the water with the candidates for baptism and, one by one, he would dunk each person three times fully underwater, while saying the words of the baptismal formula.

Hold a class discussion using some or all of these questions:

- What do you know about your own Baptism?
- Who are your godparents?
- If you haven't been baptized, have you ever attended a Baptism? What was it like?
- Have you witnessed a Baptism of immersion as St. Augustine experienced in the painting?