

# **THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS**

## **The Sacraments of Initiation**

Baptism  
Confirmation  
Eucharist

## **The Sacraments of Healing**

Penance (*also known as Reconciliation or Confession*)  
Anointing of the Sick

## **The Sacraments of Service to Communion**

Holy Orders  
Matrimony

# LITURGY



## *What is “Liturgy?”*

In ancient Greek, the word “liturgy” denotes a kind of public service. In the New Testament, the word is used to describe Zechariah’s priestly duty (Lk 1:23), the work of evangelization that the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to (Acts 13:2), Paul’s priestly service of evangelizing the Gentiles (Rom 15:16), the work of collecting alms for poor churches (2 Cor 9:12), the building up of the faith of the Philippians which Paul sacrifices himself for (Phil 2:17), and the assistance which Epaphroditus renders Paul (Phil 2:25, 30). In Christian tradition, liturgy denotes *the official worship of the Church*, from which evangelization and deeds of charity flow. In this way, it is not only priestly, but prophetic and kingly as well, by extension.

In short, liturgy is worship. It is the official worship of the Church. It is the worship which the “whole Christ,” Head and members, offers lovingly to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The latest Church council, Vatican II, describes it as the “exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ.”

It is important to understand that liturgy is not primarily the worship we offer God. It is rather the worship that Christ offers the Father, and we are joined to that worship through being members of His Body, the Church, through Baptism. *It is Jesus drawing us into His worship.* In the liturgy, Jesus offers up His great act. Which act? The greatest act of love that the world has ever known: the act by which He laid down His life on the Cross in perfect love of the Father and perfect love of us. In Catholic tradition, we speak of the whole Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus as one great act, the *Paschal Mystery*. This great “act” is not only at the heart of history: it is at the heart of the Church’s worship. The *Paschal Mystery*, then, is the great act of love that Christ in His risen humanity offers unceasingly to the Father, involving His Church. As Jesus draws us into His worship, then, our worship is made and perfected through Him, and God heals, blesses, and sanctifies us through Him. So, in the liturgy, at the same time, God is glorified, and we are sanctified. In the gift of the Eucharist, and with the command, “Do this in memory of me” from the Last Supper, Jesus has entrusted this great act of love, the Paschal Mystery, to the Church.

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He has thereby given the Church the means of adequately worshipping the Father through Him in every age. In this way He draws Christians of every age into His great act of love. And because this act is celebrated and offered in the liturgy, the liturgy is called the “source and summit of the Christian life.” The Christian life flows from the Paschal Mystery, and all Christian acts are ordered to the Paschal Mystery, celebrated and offered in the liturgy.

Christians are called to glorify God in everything they do, through Christ, and so live lives of worship. However, there are certain acts of the Church which make the Paschal Mystery present in an “official” and privileged way. These are the “instances of liturgy,” or “instances” of the official worship of the Church. These “instances of liturgy” includes the celebration of each of the seven *Sacraments*. They also include the *Liturgy of the Hours*, which priests and religious, and some lay people, pray at different times of each day. They also include various kinds of *Blessings*.

Liturgy, then, is an act. It is an act of worship. It is the act of Christ offering up His Paschal Mystery to the Father in a way that involves the participation of the Church. In the Mass, we refer to this act as a *sacrifice*, and it is for this reason that the notion of sacrifice is at the heart of the concept of liturgy. In order to better understand liturgy and the notion of sacrifice, it is helpful to understand how the Passion of Christ is a sacrifice. And in order to understand how Christ’s Passion is a sacrifice, it will be helpful to consider the background of ancient pagan and Jewish sacrifice.

### ***Why did ancient cultures practice sacrifice?***

The practice of sacrifice was universal in the ancient world, and yet is almost entirely absent from the modern world. It is not surprising why the idea and practice of sacrifice is so foreign to us and our sensibilities. Many people today mistakenly think that ancient sacrifice was all about doing violence to an animal. The essence of ancient sacrifice is not violence though. The essence to ancient sacrifice is, rather, offering, the offering of something good to a god. Because ancient gods were often thought of as above human beings, yes, but also as very human-like, ancient peoples thought that gods would like the same things that humans like, namely a good meal! In both ancient and modern times, we honor important guests by giving them a good meal. In the case of the gods, however, there is need to transfer the meal to their realm. This was done by fire. Hence, ancient sacrifice was mostly about offering edible things (the best of one’s domestic animals or grains) to the gods, and passing these things over to the gods by means of smoke generated by fire on an altar. So, the violence done to an animal was not the goal of sacrifice, just like the violence used in hunting and processing an animal is not the goal of hunting. Instead, whatever destruction is involved in hunting is simply a means to feeding people. Likewise, ancient sacrifice was all about presenting something good to a god, something the god would like, for the sake of getting the god to bless you in some way or to abate his or her anger. Any violence done was only the means and preparation for offering something pleasing to the god, not the goal.

For important causes and pleadings, bigger and more valuable animals were sacrificed. Following this logic, some ancient cultures resorted to human sacrifice. When things got desperate, some people thought that perhaps offering up the most valuable thing of all (human life) would be pleasing to this or that god. So, if offering up many oxen didn't obtain the desired results, they sometimes tried offering up something yet more valuable, human beings. Perverse, yes, but their reasoning often followed these lines.

***Why did the Jews practice sacrifice?***

Because the Israelites and Jews believed in one all-powerful God who did not have human needs and desires like the gods of other cultures were thought to have, it is legitimate to ask why they practiced sacrifice at all. After all, God neither needs nor desires food. He needs nothing. This is affirmed very clearly in Scripture. At the same time, the Pentateuch shows us that the whole system of sacrifice was divinely instituted. Why would God ask for sacrifice, then, since He does not need it, and the Israelites know this?

The answer is that it is for our good, not God's good. The sacrifices were meant to function as exterior signs of interior acts of worship. That is, the various sacrifices of the Old Testament provided the people with a physical and tangible way to express their devotion to God. Because we are body and soul, it is fitting that we human beings express our interior worship of God in an outward and physical manner. Jewish sacrifice was a means of doing this. Thus, the whole-burnt offering, where the whole animal or all the grains were offered up, was a way of expressing our total love for God. Communion sacrifices, where part of the animal was offered and part eaten, expressed being in relationship with God. Sin offerings were a means of expressing sorrow for sin, and of making atonement and obtaining forgiveness. Thank-offerings, or free-will offerings, were a means of expressing one's free, non-obligated thanksgiving to God for favors received. And so forth. In this way, the sacrifices were pedagogical and formative for the people of God. They taught the people how to relate to God. They were also a means of expressing worship to God.

At the same time, we know that an exterior act can be done without the heart being involved, or without a person having true repentance or conversion, and sincerity of heart. In such cases, the sacrifices became empty. The prophets would decry such empty and presumptuous devotion. They reminded the people that what God really wanted was conversion of heart and righteousness, not the blood of goats and calves. So, while it is fitting that we outwardly express our interior worship to God, the sacrifices do no good and become empty if not accompanied by conversion of the heart and righteous living.

***In light of these dynamics of sacrifice, how can Christ's Passion be called a sacrifice?***

St. Augustine once articulated that there are four essential parts of sacrifice:

1. The *God* to whom the sacrifice is being offered
2. The *People* for whom the sacrifice is being offered
3. The *Priest* who is offering the sacrifice to God for the people
4. The *Victim* (sacrifice itself) that is offered upon an altar

But when we look at the Cross of Christ, at first glance, it looks nothing like a traditional sacrifice. There are Jewish priests present when Jesus is crucified, but, in their mind, they are putting a blasphemer to death, not offering sacrifice. There are people there, but many of them are in favor of Christ's crucifixion. Those persons who aren't supportive do not see this as a sacrifice, but as a great travesty. God is present, but Jesus feels the forsakenness of sin in His sufferings, and cries out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" even though He is without sin and does not doubt His Father's presence. There is also no traditional altar, or animal or grain sacrifice being burned upon it. Thus, the scene of the Passion, on the surface level, in no way looks like a sacrifice.

The Last Supper, however, is the key to understanding how the Passion of Christ on the Cross is a sacrifice. At the Last Supper, Jesus takes bread and wine and declares them to be His Body and Blood. Since the context is a Passover meal, all is offered to God in prayer. What is offered is His Body and Blood, which is Himself. Who offers it is also Himself. This means that Jesus is both the priest and the victim. It is also not only offered to God, but for the people as well: Jesus says that what He offers is "for many" and "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). And He is clearly identifying the transformed bread and wine with what will be given up and poured out the next day on the Cross. In other words, Good Friday is contained in Holy Thursday. The act of the Passion is contained in the Eucharist. Further, since Jesus is fully God and fully man, He is one with the God to whom the sacrifice is being offered, and one with the people for whom the sacrifice is being offered. Hence, at the Last Supper, He is seen to embody all four essential aspects of sacrifice. He is the priest, the victim, and is one with God and the people in the sacrifice. The Last Supper, then, helps us to realize how Good Friday is a sacrifice.

The Passion of Jesus is the sacrifice that fulfills all ancient sacrifices. It fulfills the whole-burnt offering, since Jesus gives Himself totally. It is a Communion sacrifice, since Jesus gives it to us to partake of in the Eucharist. It fulfills the sin-offering, since on the Cross Jesus bears the sins of the world and says that the Eucharist is "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). It also fulfills the thank-offering, or free-will offering, since Jesus "gave thanks" at the Last Supper and offers Himself to the Father freely and voluntarily. The very word "Eucharist" also means "thanksgiving." In a sense, Christ's Sacrifice also fulfills and corrects human sacrifice. It is interesting that the greatest and most perfect sacrifice in history did not involve an animal or grains, but rather a human being. The truth behind human sacrifice

is that human beings are valuable, and that ultimately God wants us, not animals or grains. Where human sacrifice went wrong is in the manner of offering. God does not want our death, or for us to be offered as food. He rather wants us to be given and “offered” to Him in love and in the manner of our life. Further, all animal and grain sacrifices, as we have seen, were meant to symbolize and express our interior worship, that is, the offering of ourselves to God. They were all supposed to be a means of us giving ourselves to God in love. In the Passion of Christ, Jesus gives Himself completely to God in love, faithful even unto death. The way Jesus was put to death was unjust. However, in this injustice, Jesus willingly offers Himself in love to God and for us and for our salvation.

It is also for these reasons that the Passion of Christ is the Sacrifice that puts an end to all other sacrifices, which were provisional and incomplete. This Sacrifice is what all other sacrifices were trying to achieve but fell short of. The Passion of Christ is true worship. It is true worship, because it is total love, faithful unto death. When we give ourselves to God, our self-gift falls short, because of our sins. But the self-giving of Christ to the Father is pure and perfect love without sin. It is fully pleasing to the Father, because it is the perfect expression of total self-giving love without selfishness and sin. For us to worship God, then, we can now offer up in our own way—in the Mass and through the priest, and in our lives—this perfect act of Jesus, the *Paschal Mystery*. And we seek to let this sacrifice, this act of perfect love, perfect our worship and purify our hearts and lives. This is the Sacrifice that purifies our worship, and graces and teaches us to offer ourselves in love to God, in union with Jesus and for the good of others. It is also the act that teaches us how to live, since the Church calls us to mirror in life what we contemplate in worship. The perfect and total love that is at the heart of the Passion, and at the heart of all Christ’s deeds and words, is supposed to be at the heart of everything we say and do as well. In this way, through the liturgy, Christ draws us into His perfect and total love, helping us to love like He loves. It is a love that heals and sanctifies us, even as it glorifies God. So, in the liturgy, and in life by extension, we are called to offer ourselves to God in union with the offering of Jesus. In this way, we celebrate, receive, and seek to imitate and live out the perfect love that we see and experience in the Paschal Mystery. In every Mass, the Paschal Mystery becomes present on our altars in the Eucharist. We are then called to contemplate this great act of love, to unite ourselves with it, to be transformed by it, and to mirror it in our every day lives.

***How is each Mass a sacrifice, then?***

At each Mass, the same sacrifice is celebrated and offered over and over again. It is not that Jesus is being sacrificed over and over again. He only offered Himself once upon the Cross. However, in the Mass, the one sacrifice of the *Paschal Mystery* is made present, offered, and applied to people in various times and places. It is a re-presentation of the one offering made at the Last Supper and which contains the whole Paschal Mystery. It is the worship of Jesus entrusted to the Church, and celebrated by the Church throughout history as the center of her worship and life.

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All the “instances of liturgy,” then tap into and draw upon the inexhaustible font of grace that is the Paschal Mystery. The Mass, above all, contains and celebrates it. All other instances of liturgy (the other Sacraments, Liturgy of the Hours, and Blessings) are united to, and directed to, the celebration of the Paschal Mystery in the Mass.

As we can see, the concept of liturgy is rich and deep. It can be difficult to understand at first. With time and greater understanding, however, its power opens up to us and attracts us into its inner riches.

### ***What is the “Liturgical Year”?***

Over the course of a year, the Church unfolds and celebrates the mysteries of the life of Christ. She also celebrates feasts of Mary and other saints as part of the mystery of Christ. We call this organized year of celebration the “liturgical year.”

There are two main feasts of the liturgical year: *Christmas* (when we celebrate the birth of Christ into our world) and *Easter* (when we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, having defeated the evils of sin, suffering, and death). And because these feasts are so significant, we celebrate them, not for one day only, but for eight days solemnly. Hence, we have the Octave of Christmas, and the Octave of Easter. Even beyond that, we have a season of Christmas that extends up until the Baptism of the Lord. Likewise, we have a whole Easter season that extends beyond the octave all the way to the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. White is the liturgical color for the Christmas and Easter season. Gold can be used as well but is usually reserved for the greatest feasts.

Further, because the two feasts of Christmas and Easter are so important, we have whole “seasons” to *prepare* for them. Advent is the four-week season leading up to Christmas. Lent is the 40-day season that leads up to Holy Week and Easter. Advent begins the Liturgical Year. Purple, or violet, is the color for the preparation seasons of Advent and Lent. On one Sunday just past the halfway point in both Advent and Lent, the color rose is worn. This expresses the joy of anticipation as we near the great feasts of Christmas and Easter.

Between the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Lent (in the early Spring), and from after Pentecost (late Spring) until the next Advent (December), we have the “Time of the Year,” or “Ordinary Time.” During this time, we celebrate the public life of Jesus. The color green is used for this time. There are 34 weeks designated for Ordinary Time. Toward the end of the liturgical year, we meditate on the “last things,” and on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, before the next Advent begins, we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. This feast crowns the whole liturgical year. Thus, the liturgical year with these seasons can be outlined in this way:

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- Advent > Christmas
- Ordinary Time
- Lent > Holy Week & Easter
- Ordinary Time

With this ancient format, the Church celebrates the early life of Jesus at Christmas, the public life of Jesus during ordinary time, and the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus, as well as the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost, in the Easter season. She also reminds and prepares herself for the second coming of Christ at the end of ordinary time, the end of the liturgical year.

### ***Why is Sunday so important and central in Christian worship?***

Sunday is the constant throughout the liturgical year. Sunday is the day on which Christ rose from the dead. Sunday Mass is the main liturgy at which all Christians are expected to gather, following Our Lord's injunction, "Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25). It also fulfills the third of the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament, which is "You shall keep holy the Sabbath day" (Ex 20:8; Dt 5:12). For Christians, the Sabbath day (traditionally Saturday) has been transferred to Sunday because of Christ's Resurrection. Sunday then is the new "Lord's day." It is the "first day of the week" (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2), the "day" on which the universe was created as it were, the day on which Christ recreated the earth through His Resurrection, and the day that the Holy Spirit came upon the Church at Pentecost. For these reasons, attendance at Sunday Mass is a serious obligation for Catholics, unless someone is sick or has some other serious reason for not coming. But it should be thought of more as a joy, blessing, and privilege than simply an obligation and duty.

### ***What is "Holy Week" and the "Triduum"?***

*Holy Week* is the holiest week of the year. It begins a week before Easter, on "Passion Sunday," or "Palm Sunday," which celebrates Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Mass on this Sunday begins with the reading of the account of Jesus' triumphal procession, the blessing of palms, and a procession into the church. The whole Passion account from Matthew, Mark, or Luke is read, according to whether the year is Year A, B, or C. Thursday of this week is called "Holy Thursday," and one evening Mass is celebrated which commemorates the Last Supper, with the washing of the feet, and the gift of the Eucharist and priesthood. At the end of Mass, there is a procession with the Eucharist and veneration into the night. Earlier in the day, and sometimes earlier in the week, the *Chrism Mass* is celebrated at Cathedrals around the world. Priests gather with their bishop for this celebration. They renew the commitment of their priesthood and obtain *Holy Oils* for the Church's Sacraments. Friday is called "Good Friday," and it celebrates the Passion of Christ on the Cross. It is the one day of the year when no Mass is celebrated. We enter into the barrenness of the Cross. There is a liturgy of the Word, however, followed by a veneration of the Cross, followed by the

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reception of Holy Communion. The Hosts received, however, are consecrated from the day before. Saturday of Holy Week is called “Holy Saturday,” and no Mass is celebrated until the evening. On that evening, the greatest and longest feast of the year is celebrated, the *Easter Vigil*. The Easter Vigil has four parts: the Service of Light, the Liturgy of the Word, the Baptismal Liturgy, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It usually begins outdoors, where a fire is prepared and blessed, from which a new Easter Candle, or *Paschal Candle*, is lit. All process into the Church following the Paschal Candle, which is a symbol of the risen Christ. After the ancient hymn, the *Exultet*, is sung, there are numerous readings from the Old Testament. Then, the Gloria is sung, a passage from Romans read, the Gospel proclaimed, and a homily given. After that, there is a baptismal liturgy when those who have been in RCIA officially or fully enter the Church and receive her Sacraments. After everyone renews their baptismal vows, the Mass proceeds as normal with the Eucharistic Prayer and Holy Communion. A special, sung *Alleluia* is added to the dismissal.

The three great feasts of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Good Saturday, including the Easter Vigil, is called the *Sacred Triduum* (Sacred Three Days). Although Catholics are required to attend an Easter Mass, no one is required to attend the Triduum services. Rather, all are encouraged to come of their own volition, as they are able. The Triduum is at the heart of Holy Week, the Liturgical Year, the Church, and the Christian life.

### *What are “feast days”?*

Feast days are special days that celebrate some aspect of the life of Jesus, or which celebrate Mary and the saints. Some are “moveable,” meaning that they fall on different days each year, like Ash Wednesday, Easter, the Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Most are on the same date every year. The following are some significant feast days assigned to a certain date:

January 1	Mary, Mother of God
March 19	St. Joseph
March 25	Annunciation
May 31	Visitation
August 6	Transfiguration
August 15	Assumption of Mary
September 14	Exaltation of the Cross
December 8	Immaculate Conception
December 25	The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Not all feast days are of equal importance. It is for this reason that there are three general rankings of feasts: solemnities, feasts, and memorials. They are distinguished liturgically in the following ways, with regard to the Mass:

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- ***Solemnities:*** Solemnities are the highest rank. Christmas, Easter, all Sundays, and the highest feast days celebrating Jesus, Mary, and certain Saints are ranked as solemnities. On solemnities, there are two readings which precede the Gospel at Mass. The *Gloria* and the *Creed* are also sung or recited. Six candles are fittingly used on or around the altar.
- ***Feasts:*** Feasts are the next highest rank. The Presentation, Transfiguration, most of the feasts of the Apostles, and others are celebrated as “Feasts.” Usually on a Feast there is only one reading before the Gospel, and the *Gloria* is sung or recited, but not the *Creed*. When Feasts are occasionally celebrated on Sundays, they are celebrated in the manner of a Solemnity. Four candles are fittingly used at the altar.
- ***Memorials:*** Most saints’ days are celebrated as a Memorial. Neither the *Gloria* nor the *Creed* are sung or recited. There are two types of Memorials, *Obligatory* and *Optional*. The Memorial of St. Mary Magdalene on July 22 is an example of an Obligatory Memorial. Whereas the Memorial of St. Patrick is on March 17 and is Optional. Obligatory means that a priest must celebrate the daily Mass on that day in honor of that saint, whereas he is not required if it is an Optional Memorial. Just two candles are used at the altar for memorials.

Whenever two feasts fall on the same day, the greater feast trumps the lesser.

The color *red* is used for Good Friday, Pentecost, and for feasts of martyrs. *White* is used for all other saints. *Violet, white, or black* can be used for funerals and for All Souls.

### ***What are “holy days of obligation”?***

Throughout the world, there are certain solemnities that fall outside of Sunday on which Catholics are obligated to attend Mass. In the United States, there are six:

January 1	Mary, Mother of God
(date varies)	Ascension Thursday ( <i>when it hasn't been transferred to Sunday</i> )
August 15	Assumption of Mary
November 1	All Saints
December 8	Immaculate Conception
December 25	The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Churches offer various times for Masses on these days, to make it convenient for people to go, given their work schedules. Often, evening Masses are offered on the night before and night of the feast.

***Is Mass celebrated every day?***

Yes, Mass is celebrated every day of the year except on Good Friday and Holy Saturday before the Easter Vigil. Usually daily Masses are about thirty minutes in length. No Catholics are obliged to go to daily Mass. However, many people like to go and find great blessing in going. They are able to hear much of the Scriptures read, regular homilies, and are able to receive the Holy Eucharist every day. Many retired and unemployed people go, as well as many workers either before or after work, or on their lunch hour.

***When do Catholics fast?***

Fasting is a general, praiseworthy practice which can help us discipline ourselves, be more detached from earthly food and comforts, draw close to God, and open ourselves up to the needs of others. However, the Church calls us all to fast together at certain times. The Church calls us to fast from food for at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion, in normal circumstances, in order to better appreciate and prepare for the Eucharist. She also calls us to either fast from meat or make some other sacrifice every Friday of the year. On the Fridays of Lent, she requires us to give up meat completely. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, she requires us to abstain completely from meat and to limit ourselves to eating one full meal during the day, and two other snacks if needed for strength. This is something we all do together in order to honor the Passion of Christ. It should be seen as a blessing, not a burden. Jesus calls us to be joyful and unnoticed in our fasting (Mt 6:16-18).

***What is the Liturgy of Hours?***

In short, the *Liturgy of the Hours* involves praying the psalms at different times of the day, along with other prayers. The Church has organized a way of praying the psalms and other prayers throughout each day and throughout the liturgical year. Priests and religious are obliged to pray the *Liturgy of the Hours*. For lay people, it is completely optional. The *Liturgy of the Hours* traditionally would have been prayed every three hours throughout the day, and so would there were eight times when prayer was offered throughout the day. In our day, however, there are five main periods of prayer:

- Office of Readings (traditionally prayed at midnight but now prayed at any time)
- Morning Prayer (usually prayed between 6-9am)
- Daytime Prayer (usually prayed between 9am and 3pm)
- Evening Prayer (usually prayed between 5-7pm)
- Night Prayer (prayed before going to bed)

Each prayer takes about 5-20 minutes, depending on length, on whether it is sung or recited, and on how quickly or slowly it is prayed.

***What are Blessings and Sacramentals?***

We are called to use everything for the glory of God. Therefore, the Church provides blessings for persons, animals, plants, buildings, vehicles of transportation, tools, devotional items (such as rosaries or sacred images), water, and other items. There is an official *Book of Blessings* which the Church uses for all of these things, with readings that relate from Scripture, and prayers that accompany the blessing. Most blessings are reserved for priests and deacons to give, in virtue of their ordination. Some blessings are reserved to the Pope, or bishops, or priests of particular religious communities. Lay people can give certain blessings. For example, we are all encouraged to “bless ourselves” with Holy Water as a reminder of our Baptism, and parents are encouraged to “bless” their children with the sign of the cross on their forehead when going out or before going to bed. Blessings are all about Christ blessing us and all the things we use in our daily lives, so that everything we do can be sanctified and better ordered to the glory of God.

At churches, Holy Water is regularly available to the faithful. They are encouraged not only to bless themselves with Holy Water as they enter and exit the church as a reminder of their baptism, but also to fill up a container of Holy Water to bring home with them. The faithful can have a little font or bowl of Holy Water in their homes and apartments, so that they can bless themselves there.

It is also recommended that the faithful ask to have their house or apartment blessed. You can make an appointment with the priest. It is fitting to invite family members and friends. It takes about ten minutes. After beginning in a central room and asking God’s blessing upon all who live in one’s dwelling, the residents guide the priest to all the rooms. The priest sprinkles the rooms with Holy Water. All come back to the central room and end with prayer and song.

You are also encouraged to seek blessings for new rosaries, sacred images, and other devotional items. A priest can usually do this quickly and easily after Mass.

*Sacramentals* include blessings and blessed things. They can be seen as an extension of the Sacraments and as a way of making one’s daily life holy. When used rightly, they are ordered back to the Liturgy and Sacraments as well. One should not use sacred and blessed items in a superstitious way, but as a means of growing in one’s faith and directing everything to God’s glory.

**SCRIPTURAL READINGS**

“The priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.” —Lev 4:20

“Sacrifice and offering you do not desire; but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.’”  
—Ps 40:6-8

Psalm 50     *(the acceptable sacrifice)*

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.” —Is 1:11, 16-17

“For by a single offering He (Jesus) has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”  
—Heb 10:14

“Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” —Heb 9:23-26

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the sons of Israel, and I will bless them.’”  
—Num 6:22-27

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. *What is Liturgy, and what are the different “instances of Liturgy”?*
2. *How are we called to participate in the Liturgy?*
3. *How do we live the Liturgy in our daily lives?*

**READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

*Bible:* Jn 19 / CCC: 1113-1134

# THE SACRAMENTS



## *What are the Sacraments?*

A *Sacrament* is a channel of grace. Traditionally, a Sacrament has been defined as sacred sign instituted by Christ to confer grace. In every Sacrament, there is a visible element, and an invisible element. The visible is a sign of the invisible. What happens exteriorly points to what is happening interiorly. Christ acts upon us in the Sacraments on this deeper, invisible level, and we encounter Him therein. In the Sacraments, the love, power, and grace of the Paschal Mystery is applied to us in a particular way, for the sanctification of our lives.

Catholic Teaching names seven Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. But these are categorized under three headings:

### **The Sacraments of Initiation**

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Eucharist

### **The Sacraments of Healing**

1. Penance
2. Anointing of the Sick

### **The Sacraments of Service to Communion**

1. Holy Orders
2. Matrimony

***Why are there seven Sacraments?***

In natural life, we are born, we grow, we are fed, we heal, we have different roles in life, and we die. The sacraments correspond to these dimensions. Baptism is spiritual birth. Confirmation is spiritual growth. The Holy Eucharist is spiritual food. Penance, also called Reconciliation or Confession, is spiritual healing. The Sacrament of Matrimony is spiritual marriage. Holy Orders consecrates certain men to shepherd the Church in the name of Christ. It is spiritual leadership. Anointing of the Sick spiritually strengthens, forgives, and sometimes heals a person in life-threatening sickness. It is also consecrates one's death to Christ. So, through the Sacraments, Christ consecrates these different dimensions of our lives and elevates them, so that our lives might be sanctified by His grace.

Because Christ is the source of the seven sacraments, the sacraments are divine gifts and doorways into the mystery of God and encounter with Christ, and a font for the Christian life. The following explain how the sacraments originate from Christ.

1. ***Baptism:*** Before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He instructed His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19-20).
2. ***Confirmation:*** The gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the Church at Pentecost. Confirmation is a share in the grace of Pentecost. In the Acts of the Apostles and elsewhere in the New Testament, we see this gift of the Holy Spirit being imparted through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-18; 19:1-7; Heb 6:1-2).
3. ***Eucharist:*** At the Last Supper, Jesus gave the Church the Gift of the Eucharist, His Body and Blood, and He instructed His apostles to “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24).
4. ***Penance / Reconciliation / Confession:*** When Jesus appeared to His disciples as risen from the dead in the upper room, He breathed on them the Holy Spirit and gave them the power to forgive sins, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:23).
5. ***Anointing of the Sick:*** Jesus not only made healing the sick an essential part of His ministry; He sent His apostles out to anoint the sick with oil (Mk 6:13). It is for this reason that St. James says, “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save this sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven” (Jas 5:14-15).

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6. ***Holy Orders***: By choosing twelve apostles, by giving them authority to teach and heal, and by giving them the power to celebrate the Eucharist and communicate God's forgiveness, Jesus ordained men to shepherd His Church in His name.
7. ***Matrimony***: Jesus calls Himself "the bridegroom" (Mt 9:15; 25:1-10), since He is the Lord Who has come as the Bridegroom of His people, since He, the Son of God, has wedded Himself to humankind in becoming man, and because He will lay down His life in love for His bride, the Church (Eph 5:25). Christ also blessed the Wedding Feast of Cana with His presence (Jn 2:1-11). Marriage between believers, then, shares in the mystery of Christ's love for His Bride, the Church (Eph 5:21-33). In these ways, for believers, Jesus has elevated marriage to a sacrament.

### ***Why are there three groupings of Sacraments?***

Three of the seven sacraments are called the *Sacraments of Initiation*, because they are foundationally formative for the Christian life. They are Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Two are called *Sacraments of Healing*, since they impart healing, forgiveness, and strength in our struggle with sin, suffering, sickness, and death. They are *Penance* and *Anointing of the Sick*. Two are vocational (callings) and oriented toward the building up of the Church in different ways. These are *Holy Orders* and *Matrimony*.

### ***Why are certain Sacraments repeated, while others are not?***

Three sacraments are only given once and never repeated: *Baptism*, *Confirmation*, and *Holy Orders* (for the same degree). This is because there is something about these sacraments which marks us for God. In each of these sacraments, there is an imparting of a permanent power. This "mark" or "power" is what we call a *Sacramental Character*. Baptism inserts us into Christ's Body, the Church, and gives us the power to join in with the worship of Christ, the liturgy. Confirmation gives us the power to witness to our faith, to defend it, and to live it among the challenges and temptations of the world. Holy Orders gives men the power to bestow divine gifts (sacraments and blessings) upon the people of God, and to shepherd the flock in the name of Christ.

A similar "bond" is created between spouses in the Sacrament of Marriage, which bond endures until the death of one's spouse. Someone can be married again after one's spouse has died, then, since the former bond was only until death.

Penance and Eucharist, in contrast, are repeated often, since we need constant forgiveness and spiritual nourishment and strength. Anointing of the Sick can be repeated when one's serious illness worsens.

***What is the “form and matter” of a Sacrament?***

The *Form* of a sacrament refers to the words used that contain the power of Christ. For example, the *form* of Baptism is the formula, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The *Matter* of a sacrament refers to the material used as a channel for the bestowing of grace. For example, the *matter* of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is bread from wheat and wine from grapes. The form and matter, along with the right minister of the Sacrament, and the right intention within the minister, are all essential parts of any Sacrament. If incorrect words or matter are used, the Sacrament is not valid. For example, if the one baptizing were to say “I baptize you in the name of Zeus,” the baptism would not be valid, even if water were used. Likewise, water is necessary for baptism. Using milk is not valid. Articulating the form and matter of each sacrament helps us to be faithful to what Christ handed on to us and not depart from that.

***Why is disposition so important in the reception of the Sacraments?***

People often doubt the power of baptism when they see people who have been baptized living sinfully and selfishly. Likewise with the other sacraments. However, the sacraments work with our free-will, not independent of it. If we reject the grace of any particular sacrament after having received it, it is our fault for not living according to its grace. It is not God’s fault. Neither does it prove that the sacrament is defective. There is a saying: “What is given is given according to the disposition of the receiver.” The more open we are to receiving the grace of a sacrament, the more we will receive, and the less open we are, the less we will receive. It is we who limit God, not God who limits what He can do in us. This is why it is important to realize, as valid as each sacrament is in itself, that its fruitfulness in us depends on the disposition of our hearts. Sacraments are not magic. We are called to approach them with faith. This also highlights the importance of forming people well in their faith, so that they can better prepare for and live out the grace of the sacraments. The sacraments also nurture and strengthen faith, even as they work toward our spiritual healing and sanctification, and lead us to eternal life. In the end, the Sacraments are divine gifts and privileged channels through which God communicates His life to us, through Jesus and His Paschal Mystery, so that we might be built up in faith and love and one day be united with Eternal Love, God. We are called to come to the Sacraments with open hearts, full of faith, reverence, eagerness, and love, so that we can be open to all God wants to give us through the sacraments.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- 1. What are sacraments, how many are there, and why?***
- 2. Where do we see the sacraments as originating from Jesus?***
- 3. How are the sacraments related to life?***

**READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

***Bible: Romans 6 / CCC: 1210-1284***

# BAPTISM



“Baptism” means immersion. As spiritual birth, it is the first sacrament. It is the doorway into the life of Christ and the Church. It is also the doorway to the other sacraments. It is entrance into covenant with God and the beginning of a journey that leads to eternal life.

## *What is the origin of Baptism?*

While we find various kinds of washings of parts of the body or various items in the Old Testament, baptism as a one-time washing of the whole person is found nowhere therein. The first time we hear of baptism in this sense is with John the Baptist, at the beginning of the New Testament. John the Baptist called people to be immersed in water while confessing their sins as an act of repentance. It was supposed to be a break from the old life (symbolically washed away with the descent into the waters), and an embracing of a new life seeking the kingdom of God (symbolized when one came up from the waters). It was also a way of preparing for the coming of the Messiah, the “Anointed One.” John the Baptist foretold that the Coming One would baptize, not just with water (as he had done), but “with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16).

At a certain point, Jesus also came to be baptized by John. This was the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Before this, Jesus led a hidden life. After this point, He begins manifesting the kingdom of God through preaching, teaching, healing, and gathering and forming disciples, which activity would lead to His suffering, death, and Resurrection.

## *If Jesus was sinless, why was He baptized?*

It is true that the whole point of baptism, as John the Baptist practiced it, was for turning away from sin and living a new life. And it is true that Jesus was baptized like everyone else. However, unlike everyone else, Jesus did not confess any sins, since He had none (Mt 11:6; Jn 6:18, 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15, 1 Jn 3:5). Further, three things happened to Him at His Baptism which happened for no one else, which things give us the key to understanding the significance of His Baptism: the “heavens were opened,” the Father’s voice was heard,

saying “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,” and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him “in bodily form, as a dove” (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:32). These things show why Jesus was baptized to “fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15).

***What does the Baptism of Jesus tell us about Who He is and what He has come to do?***

The phrase, “the heavens were opened” literally means that the sky was parted or opened in some way. But this is a symbol that with the coming of Jesus, Heaven itself is opened for us. This is truly momentous, since Heaven was closed to us after the sin of our first parents. Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and a cherubim was set up at the entrance “to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). In this way, Heaven, symbolized by the tree of life, was closed to humanity. That Heaven is opened at the Baptism, and with the coming, of Jesus illustrates that something truly groundbreaking is happening. Jesus is thus revealed as the Savior, as the pathway to Heaven (Jn 14:6).

Second, God’s voice was heard. The last time that the people in general heard God’s voice was at Mount Sinai, well over a thousand years before Christ. Since the people at that time were so frightened by that voice, they insisted that God would speak to Moses, and then that Moses would relay the message to the people (Ex 20:18-26). From that time on, the people would no longer hear God’s voice directly, but only through a prophet or messenger. Now, with the Baptism of Christ, the people hear God’s voice once again. The long silence has been broken. And, whereas before, the voice spoke the “words of God,” namely, the Ten Commandments, now the voice reveals *the Word of God Himself*, Jesus. In this event as well, God the Father reveals His Son to the world, at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus.

Third, the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. In the Old Testament, we find a dove having an important place in the story of Noah and the Ark (Gen 8:6-12). Noah sends out a dove. The dove returns with an olive branch in its mouth. This is significant, since it is a sign of life, and that the flood is subsiding, since somewhere on the earth, green plants are now on dry land above the waters. Thus, it is a symbol that the old world has passed away, and that a new world, a new creation is emerging. Also, olives come from olive trees, and olive oil comes from olives, and it was with olive oil that priests, prophets, and kings were anointed in the Old Testament. In the Baptism of Jesus, then, we see the Holy Spirit coming specifically in the form of a dove, now not with an olive branch in its mouth, but pointing out the *True Olive Branch*, the “Anointed One,” Jesus, the Messiah and Christ (both words meaning “the Anointed One” in Aramaic and Greek, respectively). The dove also symbolizes that, through Christ, an old world is passing away, and a new world, a new creation is emerging.

Two other points are worth mentioning. First, there is a constant theme in the Old Testament of “salvation through water.” At creation, the Spirit of God hovers over the waters and brings forth life from them (Gen 1:2). In the story of Noah’s Ark and the Flood

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(Gen 6-9), in the crossing of the Israelites through Red Sea (Ex 14), in the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land (Jos 3), and in the curing of Namaan, the Syrian, in the waters of the Jordan (2 Kgs 5), we see the same motif (theme, pattern) that keeps on repeating: “salvation through water.” All this is imported into the Baptism of Jesus, through which salvation comes to us through water.

Lastly, the Baptism of Jesus reveals Jesus as the “servant” about whom Isaiah prophesied (Is 42:1-9; 49:5-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12, 61:1-4). The Baptism of Jesus is a sign of His humility in taking on our condition and of His future death and Resurrection: His going down into the waters as symbolizing His future death, and His rising again from the waters as symbolizing His victorious Resurrection.

### ***What does the Baptism of Jesus tell us about the meaning of our baptism?***

As in the Baptism of Jesus, when we are baptized, the heavens are opened to us. Indeed, baptism is the beginning of a journey that leads to eternal life.

As in the Baptism of Jesus, when we are baptized, God the Father says to us, silently yet truly in our souls, “You are my beloved son,” or “You are my beloved daughter.” In effect, God tells us, “You are my adopted children. You are now my sons and daughters in my Son. You are mine. You belong to me. I claim you as my own. I affirm you with my love in the depths of your being.” We “get in on” the intimate relationship that Son had with the Father in eternity and which He expresses in and through His humanity since He became man. God invites us into the intimate relationship that His Son has with Him, so that the Spirit might cause us to cry out “Abba, Father” to God, as Jesus did (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:4-7).

As in the Baptism of Jesus, when we are baptized, the Holy Spirit descends upon us, filling our souls with His presence and grace. We thereby become temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:12-20). The Holy Spirit comes in order to heal and forgive us, to make us holy, to give us spiritual gifts for the building up of the Church, to work through us to touch the lives of others, and to lead us to eternal life (Rom 8).

Finally, in our baptism, salvation comes to us through water; our mission in life and in the Church begins; and we are called to live in the image of Him Who came “not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for men” (Mk 10:45). We are, thus, called into the humility and servanthood of Jesus.

### ***What else does the New Testament teach us about Baptism?***

Jesus tells Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus commands His apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). Likewise, at the end of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15-16). In baptism, Jesus gives us to drink of the spring of water welling up to eternal life, which spring He makes mention of to the Samaritan woman (Jn 3:13-14; Jn 6:25). The water that flowed from the pierced side of Jesus on the Cross is also a symbol of Baptism, just as the blood is a symbol of the Eucharist (Jn 19:24-27; Jn 7:37-39).

The following passages about Baptism are from later on in the New Testament:

- “God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, namely eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”  
—1 Peter 3:20-21
- “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised from the dead.” —Col 2:9
- “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” —Gal 3:26
- “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” —1 Cor 12:13
- “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” —Rom 6:3
- “He saved us... in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” —Titus 3:5-6
- “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” —Eph 5:25-28

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- “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”  
—Acts 2:38
- “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” —Acts 22:16

It is very clear from these passages that baptism is not simply a symbolic action, but God really effects something in us in Baptism: He washes away our sins, He adopts us as His children in Christ, He gifts us with the Holy Spirit, He clothes us with Christ, He makes us a “new creation,” and we die and rise with Christ in order to live in the holiness and new life He bestows upon us. In this way, as St. Peter says, baptism saves us.

### ***What does the Church teach about Baptism?***

Based on divine revelation, the Church teaches the following things about baptism:

- Baptism removes the stain of original sin through the bestowal of God’s grace, although we still have to struggle with the effects of original sin, with that grace.
- In Baptism, God washes away all personal sin and punishment due to sin.
- Jesus is the One who baptizes through the human minister.
- In Baptism, we become joined to Christ and His Body, the Church; we are adopted as God’s children in Christ; the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us; and we are filled with the Holy Spirit’s gifts, namely grace, infused virtues, and the gifts of the Spirit.
- We can only be baptized once, because of the sacramental *character* which Baptism bestows, which is an “indelible seal.” This seal is a sharing in Christ’s priesthood.
- Baptism is necessary for salvation. However, God can save those who through no fault of their own did not know about the necessity of baptism or were not able to receive it before their death.
- While those in Holy Orders (bishops, priests, deacons) are the proper ministers of Baptism, anyone can baptize in case of an emergency, as long as they have the intention of the Church in baptizing and pour water on the one to be baptized, saying, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

### ***Why does the Church baptize infants?***

The Church baptizes children, because Jesus said, “Let the children come to me” (Mt 19:14). God wants us to belong to Him from the very beginning of our lives. It is not necessary to be conscious or to make an adult decision for God to bestow His grace on us. For a more in-depth explanation and defense of the Church’s ancient practice of infant baptism, you can visit [catholic.com](http://catholic.com) and search for the article on “infant baptism.”

***What is the meaning of the rituals in the Rite of Baptism?***

In the Rite of Baptism, many ritual actions full of symbolism are used. Everything starts at the door of the Church, symbolizing that baptism is the spiritual doorway into the Church. Scriptures are read and a homily given, so as to help us understand the meaning of baptism. Before the actual baptism, we ask the saints to pray for the one to be baptized; there is a prayer of deliverance from evil spirits; typically, we are anointed on our upper chest, as a symbol that we are about to be clothed with the “armor of God” (Eph 6:11, 13; Rom 13:12) and the “breastplate of faith and love” (1 Th 5:8; Eph 6:14); the water is blessed and our faith professed. In the baptism, we are baptized with a name of a saint who will be a special role model and intercessor for us. After the baptism, we are anointed with holy *Chrism* on our heads, symbolizing our participation in the priesthood of Christ; we are clothed in white to symbolize that we receive a “robe of grace” and are “clothed with our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:26); we receive a baptismal candle lit from the Easter Candle, a symbol that we have been enlightened by the light of Christ’s Resurrection (Mt 5:14; Jn 8:12); and the priest touches our mouth and ears, praying that we may soon speak and hear the words of God (Mk 7:31-37). The Rite of Baptism for Children ends before the Altar, since we look forward to the day in which the child will receive Confirmation and receive the Eucharist. An *Our Father* is prayed and a special blessing for the parents and for all is given.

***Why are we only baptized once?***

We are baptized only once, because of the indelible character that is given. If we fall away from the grace of our baptism, the way back is not through being baptized again, but through receiving God’s tremendous mercy in the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession.

***How do we live out and renew our Baptism?***

The whole Church renews our baptismal vows every Easter. It is also fitting to do this for the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. In a less solemn way, we renew our baptism every time we “bless ourselves” with holy water in our churches and homes. Above all we live out our baptism by constantly turning away from sin, growing in conversion and relationship with God, and living out our vocation in holiness in the Church and in the world.

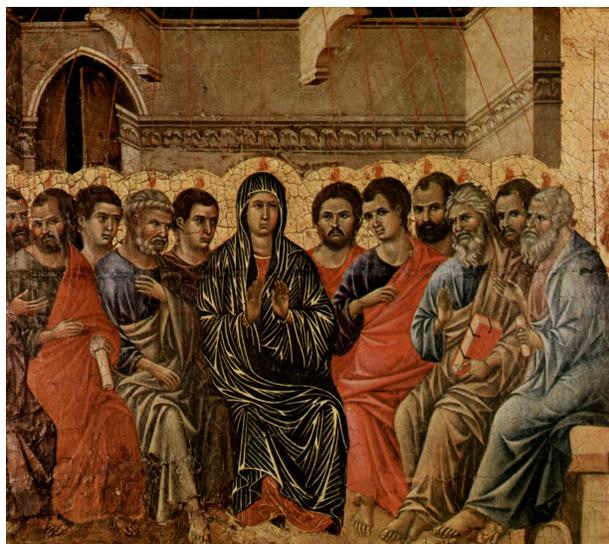
**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. *What is the background to the Sacrament of Baptism?*
2. *What is the significance of Baptism?*
3. *How do we live out our Baptism?*

**READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

***Bible: Acts 2 / CCC: 1285-1321***

# CONFIRMATION



Moses once exclaimed, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put His spirit upon them!” (Num 11:19). The prophet Joel likewise prophesied a day in which the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon humankind: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28-29). Ezekiel also prophesied a day in which the Lord would renew hearts through His Spirit: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezk 36:26-27).

Jesus, the One prophesied to bear God’s Spirit in it’s fullness (Is 11:1-3; 42:1; 61:1-2), would be the One through Whom the Spirit would be poured out on “all flesh.” For, “from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16).

It is on Pentecost that the Spirit comes upon the Church (Acts 2). Jesus prepared the apostles for this event at the Last Supper, and before ascending, when He spoke to them about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8). With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early Church was filled with strength and boldness to proclaim the Gospel to the world, often in circumstances of great opposition. But, it was the desire of Jesus that all of His future disciples would receive the gift of the Spirit, not just those present at the event of Pentecost. Therefore, later on in the Acts of the Apostles we see the apostles laying their hands on new converts after their baptism, so that they would receive this gift of the Holy Spirit. We see this in the following passages, the important phrases being highlighted in red:

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- “Peter and John... came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then **they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.** Now when Simon saw that **the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands,** he offered money...” (Acts 8:14-8).
- “While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ And they said, ‘No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ And Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them;** and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all” (Acts 19:1-7).
- “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about baptisms, **the laying on of hands,** the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (Heb 6:1-2).

Such is the basis in divine revelation for the sacrament of Confirmation. In the sacrament of Confirmation, a bishop or priest, having the power of ordination passed down to them from the apostles and Jesus Himself, lay hands on a person already baptized, that he or she may receive a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a share in the grace of Pentecost.

### *What are the effects of Confirmation?*

The following are effects of the sacrament of Confirmation:

- Completion of one’s Baptism through the reception of another sacramental *character*, which gives one the power to publicly witness to one’s faith.
- Deeper incorporation into the mystery of Christ, and the Trinity through Him.
- Deeper share in the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially through the gifts (Is 11:1-3) and fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), and through *charisms*.
- Spiritual strength: After childhood, starting with the teenage years and into adulthood, one is more exposed to the world, and therefore will face greater temptations and challenges to one’s faith. A special strength, then, is needed, in order to stay strong amidst these challenges, to witness to one’s faith in a world not always open to it, and to defend one’s faith when it is attacked or challenged. Confirmation, as the sacrament of spiritual growth and maturity, gives this grace.

- Deeper incorporation into the Church: When someone grows into being an adult in the Church, he or she should slowly discern and embrace the vocation that God is calling him or her to. He or she also becomes more aware of his or her spiritual gifts and the ways that he or she can contribute to and build up the Body of Christ, the Church. The grace of Confirmation helps one, then, to live out one's vocation in the midst of the Church as an adult in these ways.

***When should someone receive Confirmation?***

There are two legitimate traditions for the reception of Confirmation. The Eastern Churches (both Eastern Catholics and Eastern Orthodox) confer the Sacrament of Confirmation on infants, right after the Baptism. This tradition highlights the close link between Baptism and Confirmation.

Catholics in the Roman, or Latin, tradition, however, receive Confirmation later, at the age of reason (about seven years old) or older. Most often it is the bishop who confirms. This tradition highlights the link with the bishop and Confirmation as a sacrament of maturity.

Some people in the Latin Church, however, mistakenly think that a person has to be old enough to choose the faith for him/herself. However, the Sacrament of Confirmation is not primarily about us confirming our faith. It is primarily about the Holy Spirit confirming / strengthening us. It is better to go through the teenage years and the years of young adulthood with the grace of Confirmation than without it. It is without question that all the Sacraments should be internalized. And the Church is called to do everything possible to help the faith and grace of the sacraments to be thus internalized.

***Who confers the Sacrament of Confirmation?***

In the Eastern Churches, priests have the "faculty" (delegated power) to confirm infants after their baptism. In the Latin Church, it is usually the bishop who confirms children or teenagers, whereas priests are usually delegated to confirm adults.

***How is the sacrament of Confirmation celebrated?***

Very early on in the Church, the blessed, perfumed oil, *Chrism*, was added to the laying on of hands. Therefore, following this ancient practice, the anointing and laying on of hands is combined. The minister of Confirmation lays his right hand on the head of a person, while using his thumb to anoint the person's forehead with Chrism in the form of a cross, as the minister says, "(Name), be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." Meanwhile the sponsor stands behind the person and places his or her right hand on his/her shoulder in support. The name used is the name of the patron saint one has chosen. All this is preceded by a prayer which invokes the Holy Spirit and asks that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit be poured out on the person upon his/her Confirmation.

**SCRIPTURAL READINGS**

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.” —Is 11:1-3

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.” —Gal 5:22-23

“So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”  
—Rom 8:12-17

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” —Rom 8:26-27

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.” —1 Cor 12:4-11

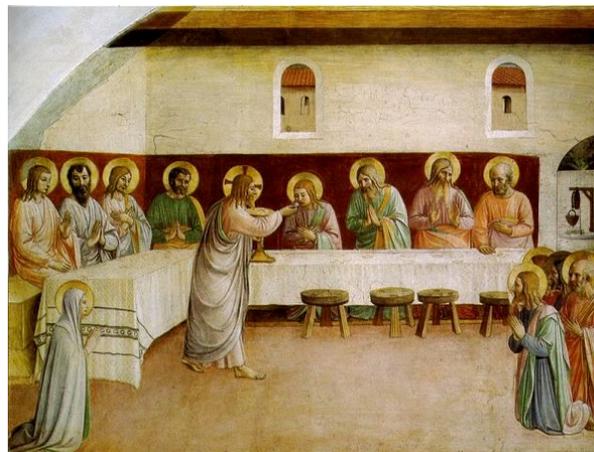
**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. *Where is the Sacrament of Confirmation found in the Bible?*
2. *What is the importance of the Sacrament of Confirmation?*
3. *How do we faithfully live out the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation?*

**READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

*Bible:* John 6; 1 Cor 10-11 / *CCC:* 1322-1419

# THE HOLY EUCHARIST



The Holy Eucharist is the greatest of all the sacraments, since it contains Jesus Himself. For this reason all the other sacraments are oriented to it: Baptism and Confirmation are completed by the Eucharist. Penance prepares us to receive the Eucharist worthily. The Eucharist crowns a couple's wedding vows, as well as the ordination of a man to the diaconate, priesthood, or episcopacy. When someone is dying and is given the "last rites," the Eucharist is the last Sacrament received, ushering the person into eternal life. The Eucharist is also at the heart of liturgy and the Christian life, and a foretaste of eternal life.

### *When did Jesus give us the Eucharist?*

On the night before He died, Jesus organized a "Last Supper" with His apostles. It took place in a specially prepared "upper room" in a house in Jerusalem, and it was in the context of the Passover. The Passover was an annual Jewish feast that celebrated the first Passover, when the Israelites sacrificed a Passover lamb in the evening, sprinkled its blood on their doorposts, consumed the lamb, and then departed from Egypt in haste. It was the night of liberation, when the Israelites left the plight of slavery in Egypt behind and commenced a journey that would lead to the Promised Land, where they could live and worship God in freedom (Ex 11-12).

The Passover was the greatest Jewish Feast, and it began a weeklong feast of Unleavened Bread. At the time of Jesus, the Passover involved lambs first being slaughtered in the Temple on the day of the evening feast. Then, each household would take a lamb to their home and celebrate the Passover meal, which included Scriptural readings, a memorial of the first Passover, various prayers, and the consumption of the lamb, unleavened bread, wine, and herbs. It was led by the head of the household.

Jesus celebrated a meal like this with His disciples on the night before He died. It was at this meal that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples (Jn 13), gave a last discourse to His disciples before His death (Jn 14-17), and gave them the gift of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23-26; Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-23). At the end of this meal, Jesus added a completely new element: He took bread and wine, declared them to be His Body and Blood which

would be “given” up and “poured out” the next day (Lk 22:19-20), told them to eat and drink, and commanded them to “do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24).

***Where is the Eucharist mentioned or inferred in the Bible?***

In the Old Testament, the Eucharist is prophesied or prefigured in the following passages:

- *The Sacrifice of Melchizedek (Gen 14:17-24)*: Jesus parallels the priest Melchizedek. Melchizedek is both a priest and a king. He is king of “Salem,” which means peace, and which is the future “Jerusalem.” His name means “king of righteousness” in Hebrew. He is greater than Abraham, since he blesses Abraham (Gen 14:19-20; Heb 7:6-10). David is considered a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). Melchizedek is eternal-like, since he seems to come from nowhere and returns to nowhere (Heb 7:3). His sacrifice, curiously, consists in the offering of bread and wine (Gen 14:18). Jesus, as the New David, is also a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 7:15-17). Jesus is both priest (Heb 4:14) and king (Jn 18:37). He is also the true king of righteousness (Rev 19:11) and Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). He is the eternal Son of God (Heb 7:3). For this reason, He is also greater than Abraham (Heb 7:6-10). His sacrifice involves bread and wine changed into His Body and Blood and offered in Jerusalem (Mk 14:12-25).
- *The Passover Lamb (Ex 12-13)*: The Passover Lamb was the sacrifice that commenced the journey to the Promised Land, making it possible for the Israelites to be delivered. The lamb had to be unblemished (Ex 12:5). It was pierced for roasting, and hyssop was used to sprinkle its blood on the doors of the Israelites, marking them as the “firstborn of God” (Ex 12:22; 4:22). Jesus is the New Passover Lamb Whose sacrifice makes our journey to the Promised Land of Heaven possible. He is unblemished in His sinlessness. He is crucified at the same time that the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple (Jn 19:14). Hyssop was used to raise vinegar to the lips of Jesus (Jn 19:29). And we partake of this Passover Lamb in the Eucharist. With the blood of Christ through the Eucharist, we are marked as the “firstborn of God” in His Son, Jesus.
- *The Manna (Ex 16:1-36)*: In a barren and food-deprived desert, God provided a bread-like substance for nourishment for the Israelites as “food for the journey” on their way to the Promised Land. The manna descended from the skies and settled on the ground six days of the week. A little manna was also preserved perpetually in the Ark of the Covenant as a kind of memorial (Ex 16:32-34). At the Last Supper, Jesus gives us the “true bread” (Jn 6:32), His Body and Blood, as a “memorial” of His Passion and as the food for our journey to eternal life.
- *The Bread of the Presence (Ex 25:23-30; Lev 24:5-9)*: The Bread of the Presence (or literally “Bread of the Face”), was one of only three things kept in the Tabernacle,

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and a special, continual sacrifice on the Golden Table within it. It seems to be “memorial” of the covenant of Mount Sinai when the elders of Israel “saw the God of Israel,” “beheld God, and ate and drank” (Ex 24:9-11). It was both a sacrifice and a meal. There were twelve loaves, representing the twelve tribes of Israel (Lev 24:5-9). On the three great Jewish feasts, the Bread of the Presence was shown to the people while being told, “Behold God’s love for you” in fulfillment of the requirement for male Jews to see God’s face on these feasts (Ex 34:23; 23:17). The Eucharist is the true “Bread of the Presence” that is given to the twelve apostles at the Last Supper. It is the very Presence of Jesus. It contains the sacrifice of Jesus offered continually to the Father through the Church. In Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, we gaze upon “God’s love for you.”

- *The Universal Sacrifice (Mal 1:11)*: While there were many synagogues in first century Judaism, there was only one Temple. And the Temple was the only place of sacrifice. Yet, Malachi foretold a day in which an acceptable sacrifice would be offered in every place around the world by the Gentiles. This is fulfilled in the Eucharist. Interestingly, this verse was the earliest Old Testament verse quoted as a prefiguration of the Eucharist by the early Church Fathers.
- *The Animal and Grain Sacrifices of the Temple (Lev 1-7; 16)*: As discussed in the section on liturgy, the Eucharist is the sacrifice that fulfills all the sacrifices of old.

In the New Testament, the Eucharist is mentioned or inferred in the following passages:

- *The Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26; Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-23)*: On the night before He dies, Jesus gives us the great gift of His love, His presence, His perfect act of worship in the Eucharist, and spiritual nourishment.
- *The Multiplication of the Loaves (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-15)*: Not only do Jesus’ miracles involving the multiplication of the loaves resonate with certain Old Testament events, such as the provision of manna in the desert (Ex 16), or when Elisha multiplied barley loaves (2 Kgs 4:1-7; 42-44), but they also resemble the Last Supper and the Eucharist in the early Church. In both the multiplication of the loaves and at the Last Supper, the “hour is late” (Mk 6:35), people “recline” (Mk 6:39; 8:6; Lk 22:14), and Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the apostles, who give it to others (Mk 6:41). The leftovers are all collected and consumed (Mk 6:43), as has always been the practice with the Eucharist in the Church.
- *The Bread of Life Discourse (Jn 6:25-71)*: Following the first multiplication of the loaves (vv.1-15) and in the context of the Passover feast (v.4), certain Jews challenge Jesus, expecting Him to perform something as spectacular as the miracle of the manna in the Old Testament (vv. 30-31). Jesus tells them that He Himself is the “bread of life” (v.35), that “whoever eats this bread will live forever” (v.58), and that He will give His flesh and blood as true food and drink “for the life of the world” (vv.55 & 51),

through which believers will “abide” in Jesus and “live forever” (vv.56, 58, 54, 50). Not knowing what this means, many no longer follow Jesus (v.66). Jesus then turns to the apostles and asks, “Will you also go away?” On behalf of the other apostles, Peter responds, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to know and to believe that you are the Holy One of God” (v.68). Although Peter and the other apostles don’t understand what Jesus means either, they trust. At the Last Supper, all is made clear in the gift of the Eucharist. It is also there that Judas will betray Jesus, at the most intimate moment of Jesus with His disciples. The mention of Judas in John 6 is just one of many connections between this chapter and the Last Supper. The greatness of the gift of the Eucharist contrasts with the greatness of the betrayal.

- *The Theme of the Chalice:* Jesus asks James and John if they are able to drink from the chalice that He will drink from and to be baptized in His baptism, which is a reference to Christ’s suffering (Mk 10:38-39). At the Last Supper, the disciples are given a share in the chalice of Christ, which is linked to His Passion. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays that, if it be the Father’s will, the chalice of His sufferings might be removed (Mk 14:36). And finally, on the Cross, Jesus says, “I thirst,” drinks a little vinegar, and declares, “It is finished” (Jn 19:28-30), referring to His sufferings but also, and above all, to the work of redemption. All these references to Christ’s “chalice” are intimately connected to the Eucharistic chalice we partake of.
- *The Road to Emmaus (Lk 24):* The appearance of the risen Jesus to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, and in Emmaus itself, parallels the Mass. Jesus first opens up the Scriptures to them, to show how He is the fulfillment of everything in the law, prophets, and psalms (vv.27 & 44). Reflecting on this, the disciples exclaim, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (v.32). After this exposition of the Scriptures, the disciples beg Jesus to stay with them. So, He does. And “when He was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (vv.30-31). The disciples would then recount to others “how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread” (v.35). Likewise in the Mass, Jesus first speaks to us in the Scriptures, and then afterwards manifests Himself to us in the “breaking of the bread.”
- *In the Acts of the Apostles:* In the road to Emmaus, and in the Acts of the Apostles, the Eucharist is referred to as “the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24:30-35; Acts 2:42-46; 20:7). The disciples remember the specific action when Jesus “broke” the bread at the Last Supper (Lk 22:19), which action is a symbol of how Christ was “broken” for us. This being-broken, however, enables us all to partake of the One Bread, Christ, and thus be unified in Him.
- *Certain passages in St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (5:7-8; 10:14-22; 11:17-34):* In chapter 5, Paul refers to Christ as the Paschal Lamb who has been sacrificed, and which sacrifice we celebrate as a “festival,” and that we are called to celebrate this

festival with the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” In chapter 10, Paul refers to the Eucharist as “spiritual food” (like the manna in the desert) and “spiritual drink” which we drink from the Rock that is Christ (10:1-4). Paul also says that we have a real “communion” or “participation” in the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist (v.16). In contrasting the Eucharist with food which pagans offered to idols, Paul implies that the Eucharist is a sacrifice (vv.18-22). He also connects the Eucharist to the Church, and sees the Eucharist as a sign and source of unity: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (v. 17). In chapter 11, Paul calls the Eucharist the “Lord’s Supper” and gives us the earliest account of the institution of the Eucharist we have (v.20). He speaks of partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ in a worthy manner, lest we be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord (v.27). He also emphasizes the social aspects of the Eucharist and our relationships in the Church, which should be marked by unity, humility, and charity, versus pride, selfishness, egoism, and division (vv.17-22).

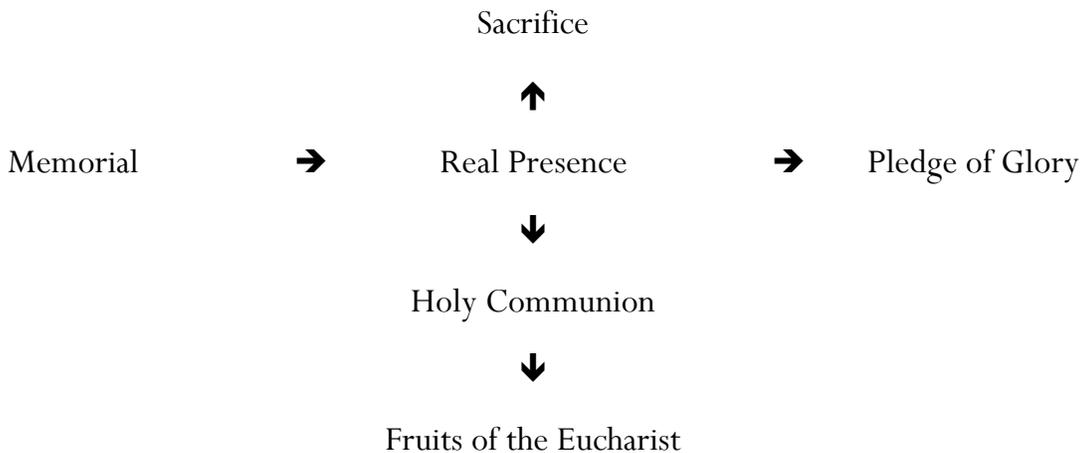
- *In the Book of Hebrews:* There are many Eucharistic overtones in the Book of Hebrews. At the end of the book, the author speaks of a Christian “altar” from which “those who serve the tent” (the Jews who do not accept Jesus) “have no right to eat” (13:10). In chapter 6, after a reference to Baptism and what we now call Confirmation (“the laying on of hands”), the author mentions that Christians have “tasted the heavenly gift” (6:4). Throughout the book, Jesus is portrayed as a priest, first “according to the order of Melchizedek” (7:1-28), and secondly as a kind of New Aaron offering His Body (10:5, 10), His Blood (9:12-14; 10:19; 12:24), indeed Himself (9:26, 28) in Heaven as a kind of new and fulfilled Day of Atonement (9-10). We will remember that Jesus, like Melchizedek, presents “bread and wine,” but in the case of Jesus changes them into His Body and Blood. Finally, at the end of the book, the author prays that God may equip his hearers with every good thing “by the blood of the eternal covenant” (13:20-21). It should be remembered that Jesus speaks about the “blood” of the “new covenant” at the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:25). In short, the book of Hebrews portrays Jesus as both a priest and victim, elucidates how His passion is a sacrifice, implies that we partake of this sacrifice when we eat from a distinctively Christian altar, and that we are equipped with every good thing through “the blood of the eternal covenant” which Christians receive in the Eucharist.
- *In the Book of Revelation:* In the book of Revelation, we are given a glimpse into the worship that takes place in Heaven. At the center of this worship is the “Lamb standing, though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6). The Lamb, Who is Jesus, is the central character throughout the book. We Catholics see the Mass as an earthly participation in this heavenly worship. As in the heavenly worship, in the Mass there is “silence” (8:1), revelation from a scroll (5:1-9; 6:14; 10:2, 8-10), the faithful united in “worship” (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:1, 16; 14:7; 15:4; 19:4; 22:3, 9) and bowing down (3:9; 4:10; 5:8, 14; 19:4), singing (4:8, 10; 14:3; 15:3), incense (5:8; 8:3-4), and we all partake of a great “supper”: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage

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supper of the Lamb” (19:9). In the book, there is also mention of a “hidden manna” and the “tree of life” which those who conquer in Christ are able to partake of (2:17; 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

### ***What does the Church teach about the Eucharist in light of these passages?***

There are many dimensions to the gift of the Eucharist. Two traditional ways of summarizing Eucharistic doctrine are (1) to speak of how the Eucharist connects to the past, present, and future, and (2) to speak of how the Eucharist “ascends” to God in sacrifice and “descends” to us in Holy Communion, and which is supposed to overflow into our lives. These two traditional summaries can be conveniently combined in the form of a cross:



Insofar as the Eucharist is connected to the past and makes it present, we call it a “Memorial.” Insofar as Jesus is present to us here and now in the Eucharist, we refer to the “Real Presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist. Insofar as it is a foretaste of Heaven and food for the journey, we call it a “Pledge of Glory.” Insofar as the Eucharist ascends to God in worship, we call it a “Sacrifice.” Insofar as it descends to us as a divine Gift that we receive, we call it “Holy Communion.” The “Fruits of the Eucharist” are a way of talking about the effects in our life that God intends to bring about through the Eucharist. Let us, then, explain each of these dimensions, one at a time.

### ***How is the Eucharist a “Memorial”?***

In the section on the liturgy, we already discussed how the past, namely the Paschal Mystery, is made present in the liturgy and sacraments, and above all in the Mass. It is important to realize that we don’t simply remember a past event in the Eucharist, but the past event becomes present to us here and now in a mysterious but real way. In the Mass and other sacraments, then, we are mysteriously and yet truly connected to the Paschal Mystery as it happened and as it in some way endures in the risen humanity of Jesus right now in Heaven.

***How is Jesus really present in the Eucharist?***

The Bible very clearly teaches that the Eucharist is not just a symbol, but the very Body and Blood of Jesus. The Church Fathers are unambiguous and unanimous on this point as well. Church teaching has affirmed it with the highest authority, and many miracles and saints through the centuries have borne witness to the truth of the “Real Presence.” The following points clarify the Church’s belief.

First, the Church teaches that Jesus is really present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist in His full humanity and divinity. The traditional language to express this is the “body, blood, soul, and divinity.”

Second, to explain the change, or transition, from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, the Church uses the term *transubstantiation*. In short, it literally means the process whereby one substance is changed into another. Simply, when bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, one thing changes and another doesn’t. The Church says that the “substance” of bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Christ, but the “accidents” or “properties” or “qualities” or “appearances” (basically everything we can perceive with our senses) don’t change. In other words, the underlying reality of bread and wine has changed into the actual Body and Blood of the risen Jesus at the words of Consecration, with the result that there is no longer any underlying reality of bread and wine, but only Jesus. At the same time, the Sacrament still looks like, and tastes like, and smells like bread and wine. There is no perceptible change. The change is on a level we cannot see and have no access to through our senses. It is only by faith that we know that the Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Jesus. But this faith is most certain.

Third, although the bread turns into the Body of Christ, and the wine into the Blood of Christ, the whole Jesus is present under the forms of both bread and wine. This is because Jesus in His risen reality is united. So, where His Body is, there also is His blood, His human soul, and His divine nature. The same is true with His blood. This is what we call *concomitance*. In short, where one part of Jesus is present, every part of Jesus is present.

Fourth, Jesus is entirely present under each part of the form of bread and wine. In other words, when the “bread is broken,” Jesus is not divided. He remains whole and entire under each part, insofar as the form of bread and wine is retained.

Fifth, the Church teaches what we might call the “abiding presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist. That is, Jesus is not only present in the Eucharist at Mass. But once the bread and wine are consecrated, He is present until the Sacrament loses the qualities of bread and wine. This enables us to bring the Real Presence of Jesus to the sick unable to attend Mass. It also enables us to reserve some Hosts in the Tabernacle in our churches, and occasionally

to expose a Host for the faithful to adore, which practice we call “Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.”

Sixth, one can think about the causes of the Eucharist. God is the main cause that changes bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. That is why we call down the Holy Spirit at Mass in what we call the *Epiclesis* (“calling down” in Greek), to effect this transformation. The priest, who is ordained in the name of Christ, acts *in persona Christi* (“in the person of Christ”) in the Mass, and since he was given the power of ordination passed down from the Apostles and Jesus Himself to consecrate (or “confect”) the Eucharist, the priest is the necessary instrument through which God effects the change of transubstantiation. The bread used for the Eucharist must be made from wheat, and the wine must be produced from grapes. The *form* of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is the words of Jesus: “This is my Body. . . This is my blood.” Finally, the priest must have the intention to consecrate this or that bread or wine, without which there is no transformation.

Seventh, the Church teaches that Jesus becomes present in the Eucharist as He presently exists in Heaven. At the same time, the Paschal Mystery, as explained before, is mysteriously and truly made present, so that we can offer ourselves in worship through the priest and along with Jesus’s perfect act of worship. Jesus is also not present in two different places at the same time, namely in Heaven and in the Eucharist. Rather, He makes His Real Presence in Heaven present to us sacramentally in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, His one real presence in Heaven is made fully present and accessible to us.

### ***How is the Eucharist a “Pledge of Glory”?***

Just as the manna in the Old Testament was “food for the journey,” sustaining the Israelites through the desert until they reached the Promised Land, so the Eucharist is our spiritual food for the journey through this life on our way to the Promised Land of Heaven. Further, just as the manna ceased once the Israelites reached the Promised Land, since they were then able to eat from the land, the Eucharist will cease as a Sacrament when we reach Heaven. This is because, as the Council of Trent in the 1500’s said, in the Eucharist we partake, under veils, of the God whom we will partake of without veils in Heaven. In this way, the Eucharist is a foretaste of Heaven.

### ***What should we know about receiving Jesus in Holy Communion?***

Bishops, priests, and deacons are what we call *Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*. Trained and designated lay people can help to distribute the Eucharist (in the Latin Rite) insofar as there are not enough clergy to distribute the Eucharist. Such lay persons are called *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*. This is a special ministry, to be an assistant to the clergy in distributing Holy Communion at Mass when there is need, and in bringing Holy Communion to the sick.

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Under non-emergency circumstances, one must be Catholic to receive Holy Communion (under certain circumstances the Orthodox can receive at a Catholic Church as well). One need at least to be in a “state of grace” to receive Holy Communion, meaning that one is in God’s friendship, having turned away from all serious sin, and having confessed all known serious sins in Confession beforehand. For the Latin Church, it is generally required to abstain from all food and drink (except water) at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion. It is also good to long to receive the Eucharist during the week, to arrive early for Mass to give oneself sufficient time to prepare oneself in prayer to receive the great gift of the Eucharist, and to receive the Eucharist with the greatest faith, love, and reverence.

In the Latin Church, the general custom is to receive Holy Communion on the tongue. However, in certain countries, including the United States, it is allowed to receive Holy Communion in the hand. Those leading RCIA will go over the how to properly receive on the tongue or in the hand, and the response (“Amen”) and gestures involved.

Lastly, after receiving the Eucharist, it is fitting to speak to Jesus intimately, since He is inside of you, to give thanks for such a tremendous gift, and to also be aware of your brothers and sisters in Christ also receiving such a great gift. It is a beautiful custom to spend a few minutes after Mass in silent prayer and thanksgiving.

### *What are the “Fruits of the Eucharist”?*

There are many fruits, or intended effects of the Eucharist in our lives, when we are open to the grace Jesus offers us:

- Our union with Christ, and the Trinity through Him, is augmented.
- We are given strength to overcome and detach ourselves from sin. The Eucharist forgives venial sin and preserves us from mortal sin. We are thus given a greater share in the healing and forgiveness of Jesus.
- We are equipped with every good thing to do God’s will and live His charity in our lives.
- We are united more deeply to our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, the Church.
- We are impelled to feed those who cannot feed themselves, in imitation of the God who feeds us in the Eucharist. The Eucharist, thus, moves us to works of mercy.
- In our lives, we seek to mirror what we contemplate in worship, namely the total self-giving of Jesus.
- Transformation: Through the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit is seeking to transform us into what we eat: Jesus. We seek to become the Gift we receive.
- Through this spiritual “food for the journey,” God is leading us step by step to eternal life.

***What are the different Eucharistic practices in the Church?***

The Mass is the preeminent celebration of the Eucharist. There are two major feasts which celebrate the Eucharist in a more focused way, however: The Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, and the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. Since we remember and celebrate many things on Holy Thursday, the Church has a separate feast dedicated in a focused way only to the Eucharist, namely Corpus Christi, which means the "Body of Christ" in Latin. All the readings and prayers focus on the Eucharist. There is also a beautiful custom to have a Eucharistic Procession after the Mass, which can happen occasionally at other special times as well. In the United States, we celebrate Corpus Christi two weeks after Pentecost.

Outside of the Mass, the Eucharist is preserved in a *Tabernacle*. In it, the Eucharist is kept present in every Catholic Church in the world continually except on Good Friday and for most of Holy Saturday. A *Sanctuary Lamp*, namely a large candle, continually burns near the Tabernacle to indicate the presence of Jesus there. The Eucharist is kept in the Tabernacle to (1) bring Holy Communion to the Sick, (2) so that we can have the comfort of the Presence of Jesus in our churches, and (3) so that at regular times we can expose a Host upon the Altar in a stand called the *Monstrance* for an extended period of prayer to Jesus in the Eucharist, which practice we call "Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament." At the beginning of this time, often an hour, the "Blessed Sacrament" is exposed. For this reason, we also call Adoration "Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament." At the end, usually a blessing with the Eucharist is given. We call this "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament." The priest covers his arms and hands with a "humeral" (shoulder) veil, in order to highlight that Jesus is directly blessing you in the Eucharist, versus blessing you instrumentally through the priest. The practice of genuflection in church can be explained by your RCIA leaders. It is a great practice, as well, to attend the times of Adoration that are offered in your church, and also to pay a "visit" to the Blessed Sacrament present in the Tabernacle in our churches. It is also a beautiful practice for Catholics to make the sign of the Cross whenever walking or driving past a Catholic Church, acknowledging the presence of Jesus therein.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- 1. How do we know that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist?***
- 2. What are the essential elements that the Church teaches about the Eucharist?***
- 3. How is the Eucharist related to our daily lives?***

**READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

***Bible: John 20 / CCC: 1420-1498***

# PENANCE



In the Creed, we profess our belief in “the forgiveness of sins.” This “forgiveness of sins” and the tremendous mercy of God that we see displayed in Jesus is communicated to us in a powerful way in the Sacrament of Penance, which we also call “Reconciliation” or “Confession.” Penance is the first and primary Sacrament of Healing. Just as Jesus forgave the paralytic, and the adulterous woman, and so many others in the Gospels, so He personally receives and forgives us in this Sacrament.

The basis of this Sacrament is the power to forgive sins that Jesus gave the apostles when He appeared to them as risen in the Upper Room:

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples of Jesus were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” —Jn 20:19-23

It is also noteworthy that, when Jesus heals the paralytic and reveals that He has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mt 9:6), the Gospel of Matthew concludes the story by saying that the crowds “glorified God, who had given such authority to men” (Mt 9:8). Interestingly, the text reads “men” in the plural, not “man” in the singular. Indeed, Jesus gives the apostles, and those ordained through them, a share in His power to forgive sins. St. Paul is also conscious of this authority when he writes to the Corinthians, “Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, to keep Satan from gaining advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor 2:10-11).

What Jesus did while He was on earth, He continues to do in every age through His Church, including and especially forgiving sins. This is why He gave the power to forgive sins to His apostles, which power is passed down to bishops and priests in every age through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The Sacrament of Penance has been exercised in different ways throughout the history of the Church, generally in a more public form in the early Church, but in a more private way later on.

***How is Penance related to Baptism?***

Baptism washes away all sins committed before Baptism, as well as all debt of sin, or “punishment due to sin.” However, we Christians still struggle with sin after Baptism. Therefore, Penance is for the forgiveness of sins after Baptism. It is most especially for those who have sinned seriously after Baptism. Instead of being baptized again every time one strays, Jesus provided this Sacrament as the way back to one’s baptismal consecration. However, this sacrament is also for the forgiveness of less serious sins and for helping someone to grow in holiness and overcome their sins and weaknesses.

***Why do I have to confess my sins to a Priest?***

Each of us should be confessing our sins to God, and turning away from them by His help, every day. However, Jesus wants us to experience His forgiveness and mercy through this channel for the following reasons:

- Our sins are not just between “me and God.” We are all members of the Body of Christ. Every good deed builds up the Body of the Church. Every sin, no matter how private, also affects the whole Body for ill. So, the Sacrament of Penance is a way of being reconciled to the Church, not only to God.
- In confession we bring our sins to the light, and this helps us overcome them. Alcoholics Anonymous has a saying: “You are only as dark as your secrets.” Similarly, the Gospel of John tells us, “For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God” (Jn 3:20-21). When we sin, we hide. We also become ashamed, but we often pretend that everything is OK. So, the inner shame we don’t share with anyone grows, and so does an inner voice of self-condemnation and the feeling of being trapped in the sin. We think to ourselves, “If others really knew who I was, they wouldn’t love me.” Confession helps us overcome this hiding, shame, pride, and inner self-condemnation. It assures us of God’s love, and that God loves us even in our brokenness and will help us to overcome our sins. It assures us that there is a way out. There is hope. And, instead of our sins having a secret power over us, we begin to expose them. We let God’s grace into the dark corners. The sin and darkness begin to lose their power. We can experience God’s forgiveness and can begin to deal with our sins instead of ignoring them and allowing them to grow unchecked. All psychologists tell us that it is extremely helpful and important to talk

to someone else about our wounds, faults, and struggles. This is an important part of the remedy, of overcoming our sins and our inner self-condemnation. We are also surprised that the person listening doesn't reject us, but understands and has compassion. He or she communicates compassion and reflects the compassion of Christ. It is helpful to be accountable to some discreet and trustworthy person (a kind of spiritual friend) for this reason. This is why St. James says, "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (Jas 5:16). Confession is a means of this accountability, but in Confession, the person to whom we are confessing our sins doesn't just listen and understand: he actually absolves our sins. Indeed, Jesus forgives us through him.

- For assurance. Even when we sin and ask forgiveness of God, we often doubt whether we are forgiven, even if we don't doubt God's mercy exactly. When we hear someone else tell us that our sins are forgiven, however, and when we know that they have power received from Jesus to absolve us from our sins, this is greatly relieving and assuring to our hearts.
- For humility. It is relatively easy to tell our sins to God. It is harder to tell our sins to someone else, because of our fear and pride: We think the other will think less of us, or even ridicule and reject us. Confession is a great way of growing in the humility that Jesus says is necessary to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 18:3).
- It is the will of Jesus. Jesus clearly gave the power to absolve or retain sins to His apostles and to the Church. But apostles wouldn't know which sins to absolve or retain unless they are told those sins. So, the confession of sins to one of Christ's representatives, the apostles or those following them who are ordained with this power, is an inherent part of this forgiveness being imparted. If Jesus gave us the gift of this great Sacrament, He obviously wants us to appreciate and make good use of the gift. Asking the question, "Why do I have to do this?" implies the wrong attitude. The proper question to ask is: "How can I best use this gift that Jesus has given us?"
- For growing in holiness. We tend to get complacent with time. By frequenting this sacrament, however, we are challenged to not let our sins remain and grow, and to constantly strive with God's grace to grow in holiness and love. Jesus also blesses and helps us through this sacrament to grow in holiness and love. In this way, this sacrament also helps prevent us from future sins, and Jesus graces us with His help to grow in the areas we struggle with.

### ***When should someone go to Confession?***

Someone should go to confession as soon as reasonably possible after having fallen into serious sin. When we sin seriously, our soul is spiritually in danger, and it is important to let Jesus save us from this state as soon as possible. It is important to turn back to God immediately, and then to make a good confession when this is reasonably possible.

The Church also requires that we confess in this sacrament all known serious sins committed after Baptism before we receive Holy Communion. So, if someone kills or seriously injures

another, or if someone engages in sexual activity outside of marriage, or if someone steals or lies in a serious way, or if someone very intentionally hates or lusts after or refuses to forgive another in his / her heart, or if someone engages in idolatry or serious superstition, etc., he / she needs to bring this to Confession before next going to Holy Communion. Because going to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is considered a serious obligation, if we have missed Mass without a weighty reason, the Church expects that we will confess this as well before going to Holy Communion again. Because Holy Communion is such a holy and tremendous gift, it is necessary to receive Jesus in a “state of grace,” meaning a state of friendship with Christ, having turned away from all serious sin. It is not required that we be perfect from all sin to receive Holy Communion. Otherwise, none of us could receive. Yet, it is expected that we at least be free from serious sins when we receive Jesus. Otherwise, to receive Jesus in a state of serious sin is itself a serious sin, which we are also required to bring to Confession next time we go.

Apart from serious sin, the Church asks all Catholics to go to Confession at least once a year. It is, however, very spiritually beneficial to go more often, even once a month, even if none of our sins is serious. We should never be afraid to go. And we should not see this sacrament as something negative. It is extremely positive. It is Jesus receiving and welcoming us, blessing us abundantly with His forgiveness, grace, and love, and helping us to grow and live His way of love in our daily lives.

***If I tell my sins to a priest, will he remember and/or possibly share them?***

The priest is under a very serious obligation to keep the *Seal of Confession*, which is *inviolable*. He cannot share the sins you tell him, either directly or indirectly. Even if civil authorities were to demand that he share what someone has confessed to him, he cannot share it and must be prepared to go to jail to uphold and be true to the seal of confession.

Priests often hear so many confessions that they don't remember which penitent (the person who confesses) told him which sins. Most often priests don't remember, even when a priest knows the person. Plus, the priest will admire you for confessing your sins, not think any less of you. He himself is very human and imperfect and only too glad to communicate God's forgiveness to you. The priest is expected to go to Confession regularly.

People naturally fear going to confession because of embarrassment, or because they are afraid of being judged and looked down upon, or because they fear that their sins will be shared. But because of the seal of Confession and the humanness and compassion of the priest, there is really nothing to fear. The great grace of Confession is that you get to confess what is troubling you and what you are struggling with, that whatever you say is under the strictest seal of secrecy, that you get to say whatever you would like to a listening and compassionate ear, that you hear the forgiving words of Jesus through the priest, that

you get to leave behind whatever you walked in with, and that you can move forward spiritually refreshed. And it's free and readily available to you!

***What are the essential elements of a good confession?***

A good, complete, confession is what we call an *Integral Confession*. This involves three basic elements:

1. *Contrition*. God always offers His mercy toward us. But for us to receive His mercy, and for it to take effect in our lives, we have to be sorry for what we have done, to turn away from it, and to resolve with His grace to do better. In this regard, we say that true contrition (sorrow for sin) involves a *Firm Purpose of Amendment*. A firm purpose of amendment means that I am not only sorry for my sins, but I firmly resolve with the help of God's grace to not go back to that sin and to do better. We also speak of "perfect" and "imperfect" contrition, or "attrition." "Perfect contrition" simply means being sorry for the love of God. "Imperfect contrition," or "attrition," means being sorry and wanting to do better with God's grace, but more from a fear of punishment than love for God. We are forgiven when we have the grace of perfect contrition. A special grace of the Sacrament of Penance is that it forgives imperfect contrition and provides the grace to have perfect contrition, that is, the grace to be sorry for the love of God.
2. *Confession*. Confession means vocally admitting our specific sins. We should do this internally to God every night before we go to bed. Verbally expressing our sins in the Sacrament of Penance is also an essential element to the Sacrament. We are only obliged to confess serious sins. Although unnecessary, it is very helpful and a good idea to confess all venial sins as well. The penitent is expected to confess the *Number* and *Kind* of serious sins. In other words, it is insufficient for a penitent just mention "stealing" when making his confession. He should specify what was stolen (money, pencils from work, etc.). There is a big difference between taking a paper clip home from work and not returning it, and stealing \$100 from someone's wallet. The penitent should also mention how many times he / she did this. There is a big difference between stealing something just once and stealing things over a period of years. If the penitent can't remember the exact number of times that he / she stole things, or got drunk, or committed adultery, etc., a good approximation is sufficient, or some indication of frequency and time period, such as, "Between the ages of 16 and 40 I probably got drunk a few times a year generally." One should not be scrupulous about details here. The whole idea is that you want to turn away from each and every mortal (serious) sin you have committed, and that you want each one forgiven, and that you want to receive the healing of Jesus for all your sins. Details of sins are not necessary to give, except insofar as they impact the sin's gravity.
3. *Satisfaction*. It is fitting that we make restitution for our sins. If we have stolen something, and it is possible to return it, we should return it. If we have damaged someone's property, we should pay for repairs. Even when there is not physical

restitution to be made (like when I had thoughts of rash judgment), it is fitting that we try to make up for it with good thoughts. In Confession, the Confessor will assign the penitent a “penance,” meaning some prayer, or set of prayers, or some good deed that will help us make up for what we have done and be a help for us in doing better and changing our behavior. We can never fully make up for our sins. And we don’t need to, since Jesus has done this. He has made full satisfaction for our sins. However, it is fitting that we do our little part to share in this, to express our sorrow, and as a remedy in helping me break with the past and do better. *Indulgences* can also help with satisfaction for sin. See the separate handout on this.

***How should I prepare for Confession?***

We prepare for our confession best through examining our conscience. We should take a mental note to ourselves whenever we do wrong. At the end of each day, we should take some time to reflect over the day, to give thanks to God for His grace and love and for the times we did well, and to ask forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings, asking for His help in doing better in the future. If we do this every night, then preparing for the Sacrament of Penance becomes easier. We will know what to confess, because we are examining ourselves regularly. It is good to examine ourselves in terms of the different virtues of the Christian life, and in light of different categories of vice and sin. There are many good written guides for this, which we call an *Examination of Conscience*. You can find one that best helps you from printed or online versions, or from different Catholic apps.

Lastly, you are encouraged to be:

- Contrite (really sorry for your sins)
- Confident (in God’s love and mercy toward you)
- Complete (not intentionally leaving out any serious sin because it is embarrassing)
- Clear (not fearing to name your sins; not being ambiguous or vague or giving excuses; but confessing your specific sins with clarity, simplicity, and humility)

***Do I have to go “face-to-face” or “behind the screen”?***

When going to Confession, you generally have the option of confessing behind the screen or face-to-face. Some people choose to go behind the screen for the sake of privacy. Some choose to do so in order to focus on God. Some choose to go face-to-face, because they feel it is easier to confess in a more conversational way. Some choose to go to a priest who doesn’t know them. Some prefer to go to a priest who knows them. You can always experiment to see what seems to work best for you.

*How do I “go to Confession”?*

1. The priest will greet you, and then you begin by making the Sign of the Cross. Then, it is traditional to say:

**“BLESS ME FATHER, FOR I HAVE SINNED.  
MY LAST CONFESSION WAS...” (weeks, months)**

2. Now confess your sins to the priest. When you have said your last sin, say:  
**“I AM SORRY FOR THESE AND ALL OF MY SINS.”**
3. The priest will assign you a penance and offer advice to help you be a better Catholic. It may be prayers, a kindness to perform, and/or a sacrifice to make. Be sure to listen carefully so you remember what your penance is.
4. The priest will ask you to pray the Act of Contrition, which is an expression of sorrow for your sins. Here is one version:

**“O MY GOD, I AM SORRY FOR MY SINS WITH ALL MY HEART. IN CHOOSING TO DO WRONG AND FAILING TO DO GOOD, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST YOU, WHOM I SHOULD LOVE ABOVE ALL THINGS. I FIRMLY RESOLVE, WITH THE HELP OF YOUR GRACE, TO SIN NO MORE, TO DO PENANCE AND TO AVOID WHATEVER LEADS ME TO SIN. OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED AND DIED FOR US. IN HIS NAME, MY GOD, HAVE MERCY. AMEN.”**

5. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, will then absolve you from your sins by saying the Prayer of Absolution. Listen for “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy spirit.” You make the Sign of the Cross and respond, **“AMEN.”**
6. The priest will offer some proclamation of praise, such as “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,” to which you respond, **“HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER.”**
7. The priest will then dismiss you by saying: “The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.” You respond, **“THANKS BE TO GOD.”** It is fitting to thank the priest as well.
8. Now you must make satisfaction for your sins by completing your assigned penance. You are also called to go forth in joy and peace, spiritually refreshed and strengthened.

**SCRIPTURAL READINGS**

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He will not always chide, nor will He keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.” —Ps 103:8-12

“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.” —Pr 3:7

“Return to the Most High and turn away from iniquity, and hate abominations intensely.”  
—Sir 17:26

“You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” —Mic 7:19

“Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the LORD GOD; so turn, and live.” —Ezk 18:31-32

“Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.” —Mt 9:2

“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” —Lk 7:47-48

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” —Lk 15:7

“Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.” —Jn 8:11

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. . . . And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.” —1 Jn 1:8-10; 3:3

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. *What are your fears or hesitations about going to Confession?*
2. *What are the benefits of Confession?*
3. *How should you best prepare yourself for Confession?*

**READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

*Bible:* James 5 / *CCC:* 1499-1532

# ANOINTING OF THE SICK



Anointing of the Sick is the second Sacrament of Healing. We have already mentioned how Jesus made healing the sick an essential part of His ministry, and how, in the Gospel of Mark, He sends His apostles out to anoint the sick specifically with oil (Mk 6:13). This is why the apostle James in his epistle says:

“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.” —Jas 5:14-15

We have also discussed how, in the sacraments, Jesus comes to sanctify the different stages of our lives. Anointing of the Sick is about Jesus strengthening us in serious illness, and bestowing the forgiveness we need in our weakness. When we are close to death, it is a means whereby Jesus consecrates our transition to the next life with His grace. Occasionally, Jesus bestows physical healing through this Sacrament.

### *When is the Sacrament of the Sick bestowed?*

When someone is seriously ill or dying, it is fitting that this sacrament be bestowed on him / her. This sacrament is also fittingly given to those of advanced age, since life is very fragile at this stage, and it is better to anoint too early than too late. Whenever someone has to undergo serious surgery, Anointing of the Sick is appropriate, since serious surgery is for a serious condition. Under serious circumstances of addiction, Anointing of the Sick might be appropriate. This sacrament is not for common, non-serious illnesses, however.

### *Can this Sacrament be repeated?*

Yes, when one is diagnosed with a new serious condition, or when one’s illness takes a turn for the worse, or occasionally in advanced age, and especially when one is dying.

***How is Anointing of this Sick bestowed?***

The Anointing of the Sick can be bestowed in or outside of Mass, and on a group of the sick or elderly, or on an individual. All must be past the age of reason. It can also be given in a church, home, hospital, or wherever the sick person is. After various prayers, readings, and intercessions, the priest prays over the sick person, laying his hands on his or her head, as St. James instructs. After that, the priest anoints the forehead of the person while saying, “Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.” The person responds, “Amen.” Then the priest anoints the person’s palms, saying, “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.” The person responds, “Amen.” It is fitting that family, friends, and parishioners support the sick person with charitable visits, and when the sacrament is bestowed, as is possible.

***What are the effects of the Anointing of the Sick?***

The effects of this sacrament are: the forgiveness of sins, spiritual strength, spiritual healing, sometimes physical healing, uniting the sick to God and the Church, consecration of one’s sufferings and dying to God, and preparation for passing over to eternal life.

***What kind of oil is used for the Anointing of the Sick?***

There are three blessed oils used by the Church in various sacraments and blessings:

- *Oil of Catechumens (OS)*: used to anoint someone before Baptism
- *Sacred Chrism (SC)*: a perfumed oil (olive oil mixed with balsam) used to anoint the crown of the head of someone just baptized; for Confirmation; to anoint the hands of a newly ordained priest; in the dedication and blessing of an Altar
- *Oil of the Sick (OI)*: used in the Anointing of the Sick

Each year, the bishop gathers with the priests of his diocese during Holy Week for the *Chrism Mass* (traditionally on Holy Thursday morning but nowadays most often earlier in the week), in which priests renew their priestly promises and oils are blessed and distributed for the parishes around the diocese. Therefore, except in emergency situations in which a priest does not have access to the blessed oils (when he will bless oil himself for a sacrament), the bishop blesses all of these oils in the Chrism Mass.

**SCRIPTURAL READINGS**

“I was sick and you visited me.” —Mt 25:36

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. *What is the purpose of the Anointing of the Sick?*
2. *What is the role of the priest and laity in this Sacrament?*
3. *When should you call a priest for the Anointing of the Sick?*

**READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

***Bible:*** 2 Tim 1 / ***CCC:*** 1533-1600

# HOLY ORDERS



Holy Orders is the first Sacrament of Service to Communion. Along with the Sacrament of Marriage, it is ordered to the salvation of others and the good of the whole Church. Through this sacrament, God shepherds His people in every age.

God worked through three principal figures in the Old Testament to form His people: Priests, Prophets, and Kings. God forgave, blessed, and sanctified the people through priests. He exhorted and taught them through the prophets. He governed and served them through kings.

Jesus Christ fulfills all three of these roles. In the New Testament, then, He is depicted as a priest, prophet, and king. He also passes on a share of this three-fold dignity to each baptized Christian. Through baptism, then, we are all priests, prophets, and kings in Christ. This is what we call the *Common Priesthood of the Faithful*. But Jesus also called apostles to share in His ministry and shepherd the Church in His name. This special, consecrated role to shepherd God's flock in Christ's name is what we call the *Ministerial Priesthood*. It is at the service to the common priesthood of the faithful. The sacrament by which this sacred role is passed on is called *Holy Orders*. The imparting of this sacrament through a consecratory prayer and the laying on of hands is what we call *Ordination*. It is the incorporation into Christ's role of shepherding the Church. In ordination, a *sacred power* is given (in various degrees) to particular men in order to bless, celebrate the sacraments, preach, and shepherd and serve the Church as leaders in the name of Christ. Holy Orders also establishes one in an order, or group, with all others given the same gift and power. So, we speak of an "order" of bishops, or priests, or deacons. Hence, we call this sacrament *Holy Orders*. In the New Testament, the passing on of the sacred power and ministry of Holy Orders through the laying on of hands can be found in Acts 6:6 (deacons), 1 Tim 4:14, and 2 Tim 1:6.

***What are the three degrees of Holy Orders?***

There are three degrees of sharing in the ministerial priesthood of Christ, all of which are found in Scripture and rooted in the early Church:

1. *Episcopacy* (bishops): This is the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The bishops are successors to the apostles and the principal shepherds of the Church throughout the world. They are “overseers,” which is what *Episcopoi*, or “bishops,” mean. Often they are appointed as a bishop “overseer” of a diocese, which is an officially designated local region of the Church. The principal church of each diocese is called a *Cathedral*, since it is where the *cathedra*, or “chair” of the bishop is. Bishops are given the sacred power to ordain bishops, priests, and deacons. They also have the power to celebrate Mass, absolve sins, and celebrate all the sacraments. At Mass, they often wear a *Miter* (pointed headpiece) and *Zucchetto* underneath (cloth skullcap) and carry a *Crosier* (decorative shepherd’s staff). They bless the faithful with a threefold blessing.
2. *Presbyterate* (priests): Priests are helpers to the bishops. Under the bishop, and on his behalf, they often shepherd or co-shepherd parish churches throughout a diocese. The main shepherd at a parish church is called the *Pastor*, while his assistant is called a *Parochial Vicar*, or “assistant pastor.” In Greek, presbyter literally means “elder.” Priests have the power to celebrate Mass, absolve sins in confession, anoint the sick and dying, bless persons and things, celebrate baptisms and marriages, and many other things. They can only confirm when given the “faculty” (delegated power) to confirm from the bishop or universal law of the Church. They cannot ordain other bishops, priests, or deacons. At Mass, priests wear a *Priestly Stole* that hangs down in front of them over their shoulders, and a *Chasuble*. Bishops wear the same for Mass, except that they add the miter, zucchetto, and crosier.
3. *Diaconate* (deacons): Deacons are assistants to the bishop and priests. The term Deacon means “servant.” It is their special role to read the Gospel at Mass and help with the Chalice at the Altar. They can bless most persons and things, celebrate baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and preside at Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. They can be given permission to preach the homily at Mass. They do not have the power to celebrate Mass, hear confessions, anoint the sick, or ordain. There are “permanent” and “transitional” deacons. Transitional deacons are only ordained deacons as a temporary step before ordination to the priesthood. Transitional deacons are only deacons typically for six months to a year and a half before being ordained to the priesthood. In contrast, permanent deacons are ordained to function as deacons for life, with no transition to the priesthood. At Mass, deacons wear a *Diaconal Stole*, which is a stole that drapes across a deacon’s chest and back and hangs to the right, and also often a *Dalmatic*, which is like a chasuble with sleeves.

So, the episcopacy is the fullness of Holy Orders. The presbyterate, or priesthood, is a lesser share in Holy Orders. The diaconate is a yet lesser share. For most priests,

priesthood is the terminal degree of Holy Orders they will receive. A few are asked to be bishops. A man is ordained in a lesser degree before being ordained in a higher degree.

***If a priest sins or is a bad priest, are the sacraments he celebrates still valid?***

As long as the matter, form, and intention of each sacrament retain their integrity, all sacraments which a sinful priest celebrates are still valid. It is Christ's will that the faithful should not suffer because of the sinfulness of a priest. Therefore, the validity of the sacraments is not dependent on the worthiness of the priest, bishop, or deacon.

***Can only men be priests?***

Yes. Jesus treated women equally to men, affirmed their unique dignity, and called them to follow Him as disciples. At the same time, He chose only men as the twelve apostles, whom He appointed and gave authority to shepherd the faithful in His name. The Church feels obligated to follow His example. This in no way means that women have any less dignity than men. Priests are spiritual fathers in the image of Christ. All men, whether called to priesthood, religious life, or the lay vocation, are called to be spiritual fathers in a way. And women, whether called to the lay vocation or religious life, are called to be spiritual mothers. The Church calls women to flourish in their feminine nature and to be involved in all aspects of the Church. The Church sees the priesthood as a distinctively male vocation, because of its connection to Christ and spiritual fatherhood. As we have mentioned, in the sacraments priests act *in persona Christi*, that is, in the person of Christ.

***Why can't priests marry?***

There have been times and traditions in the Church where certain men have married *before* ordination. However, it has never been the practice of the Church that men marry *after* ordination (except when a priest is "laicized," or allowed to return to the lay state and not exercise his priestly ministry anymore except for emergencies). In the Eastern Catholic Churches men are commonly allowed to marry before ordination. However, bishops are only selected from the celibate clergy. In the Latin Church, this was also the practice until a certain time, when celibacy before ordination was expected and required. In all Catholic and Orthodox Churches (with the exception of the Persian Orthodox after it had broken from the Church), it is the practice, expectation, and requirement that a man will never marry again after ordination, even to the diaconate, even should a man's wife die. In recent years, the Latin Church has allowed married men who were ministers in the Anglican or Episcopalian, and sometimes Lutheran, traditions, after having become Catholic, to be ordained and function as priests in the Latin Catholic Church.

The general requirement for men not to be married before ordination to the priesthood could be changed by the Church, since it is not Church doctrine, but a specific discipline that does not have doctrinal implications. However, since Christ was celibate, celibacy for the clergy is generally considered ideal. Through celibacy, clergy can devote themselves

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entirely to God and service to the Church without having to worry about dividing time between their family and the faithful. In recent decades, the Latin Church has allowed married men to be ordained as permanent deacons.

### ***How should lay people relate to priests?***

All vocations in the Church are supposed to mutually support and enrich each other. In our parish churches, priests and laity have the opportunity to collaborate for the building up and flourishing of the local Church. Priests are called to respect lay people, seek their advice and rely on their expertise, involve them in the ministries of the parish, form and guide them, bless them, and serve them. Lay people in turn are called to support and respect their priests, thank them, pray for them, listen to them, bring them ideas, and cooperate with them. At times, both priests and lay people can and should also challenge each other, but always with love, respect, and humility. They are also called to be patient with each other's imperfections. It is important above all to be focused on Christ and work together to serve Him.

### **SCRIPTURAL READINGS**

“And He (Jesus) went up on the mountain, and called to Him those whom He desired; and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, to be with Him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority over demons.” —Mk 3:13-14

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the Church first apostles . . .” —1 Cor 12:27-28

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” —2 Cor 5:20

“Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give an account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.” —Heb 13:7

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- 1. What is the Scriptural basis for the sacrament of Holy Orders?*
- 2. What is distinctive about each of the three degrees of Holy Orders?*
- 3. How should priests and laity work together for the good of the whole Church?*

### **READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK**

***Bible:*** Mk 10; Eph 5 / ***CCC:*** 1601-1637; 2331-2400; 2514-2557

# HOLY MATRIMONY



*Holy Matrimony* is the second Sacrament of Service to Communion, and the last of the seven sacraments. Marriage is naturally ordered toward the mutual good of the spouses and the procreation and raising of children. But Jesus has elevated natural marriage to the level of a sacrament, so that it might be holy, that it might be “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39), and that it might be according to the kingdom, and not be dominated and torn apart by sin. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, spouses are given a share in the love that Christ, the Bridegroom, has for His Bride, the Church. Spouses are called to contemplate that love, to imbibe it, and to express it toward each other in daily living, even as this total self-giving love is also meant to overflow to their children, and by extension from their family to the world.

The Bible begins and ends with marriage. It begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:22-25). It ends with the marriage between Christ, the Bridegroom and Lamb of God, and His Church, the Bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9; 21:2, 9; 22:17). Throughout the Scriptures, God has used different human relationships as images to communicate the kind of relationship He wants to have with us. One relationship is that of parent and child (1 Jn 3:1-2). God is a good and loving Father Who wants us, His adopted children to trust and love Him. Another relationship is that of friendship. Through Christ, God is calling us into deep and intimate friendship with Himself (Jn 15:15). Yet, the most powerful image that the Bible speaks of is spousal. In the Old Testament, God speaks of His people as His wife. Unfortunately, His wife is often unfaithful. When Israel goes after other gods, it is analogous to committing adultery (Ex 34:15-16; Dt 31:16; Jdg 2:17; 8:27, 33; 1 Ch 5:25; Ps 106:39; Is 1:21; Jer 2:20; 3:1-8; Ezk 16:15-41; 23:3, 5, 19, 20, 44; Hos 2:5; 3:3; 4:12, 15; 5:3; 9:1). But God is always trying to draw His people back to Himself (Hos 2:14-20). When God becomes man in Jesus, our divine Bridegroom becomes visible to us. In the Incarnation, Jesus weds Himself to our human nature and our race. In His public ministry, Jesus refers to Himself as “the

Bridegroom” (Mk 2:20; Mt 25:1-10; Jn 3:29). John the Baptist, Paul, and the book of Revelation will also speak of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, His Bride (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33; Rev 19:6-9; 21:2, 9, 17). Jesus’ first miracle happens, significantly, at a wedding, the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-11). In His Passion, Jesus expresses the full extent of His love for His Bride, the Church, when He lays down His life for her (Eph 5:25). At the end of time, there will be a perfect union of Christ and His Church, and an eternal wedding feast (Rev 19:6-9; 21, 2, 9, 17).

God’s beautiful vision and plan for marriage can be seen in all these and other passages in the Bible. However, the Bible also depicts marriage and family life as affected by sin. Sin affects and spoils everything. Tragically, many feel the effects of sin bitterly within marriage. When Jesus came into this world, however, He came to renew all things, including marriage. He has come to save marriage from the destruction of sin, to infuse it with His healing grace, and to help couples live out their marriage with love and virtue, so that they might reflect to each other the love that He showed us when He laid down His life for us. By letting Christ come to heal and sanctify their marriage, couples can find the peace and joy of true married love that they have longed for.

***What is the meaning and purpose of Marriage?***

The meaning and purpose of marriage is stamped in our very nature. God made human beings male and female. Man and woman are inherently oriented toward one another in their bodies. They are inherently oriented toward union with each other, and life naturally flows from this union. Further, because man and woman are inherently rational and personal, the union that man and woman are oriented toward is not just momentary or temporal, but life-long, committed, and permanent. The nature and dignity of persons demands this. In other words, man and woman, in contrast to all other creatures, are inherently ordered to the life-long relationship of marriage.

The union that man and woman are oriented to is also naturally ordered to the begetting of life. And because of the dignity and development of children, man and woman are called not only to conceive and bear life. They are called to raise and form children together.

Thus, marriage and family flow out of who we are, out of our very nature as male and female. Therefore, the purpose of marriage and the purpose of sexuality is the same, and it is twofold: *Union* and *Procreation*, or “love and life,” or “babies and bonding.” The nature of marriage, indeed, is rooted in our rational and personal nature, and in our sexual difference and complementarity.

***How is marriage elevated to a Sacrament?***

Just as Jesus changed something ordinary into something extraordinary by changing water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, so He takes our natural vocation of marriage and blesses it with His grace, so that a couple's marriage can receive His strength and healing, and also so that they can share in the love that Christ, the Bridegroom, has for His Bride, the Church, and that they might bear witness to this love to their children and to the world.

Toward this end, a Catholic couple is prepared for marriage, takes vows in the presence of a priest, is blessed in their commitment, and is given the Eucharist as the crowning of their vows. They are then called to live out their vows in daily life: in faithfulness, generosity, honesty, humility, love, communication, collaboration, forgiveness, service, and virtue.

If two persons are baptized and validly married, their marriage is sacramental. If only one is baptized, it is considered a natural but not a sacramental marriage. If the non-baptized spouse becomes Christian, the marriage automatically becomes sacramental as soon as he or she is baptized. Further, the Church requires Catholics in particular to get married in the Church for a valid marriage. Dispensations can be given for a good reason.

***What is the significance of Matrimony being a Sacrament?***

For two baptized persons validly married, matrimony is a *Sacrament*. This means that their marriage is a sacred sign. A sign is something that points to something else, that points to a deeper reality. In a sacrament, there is a visible element, and an invisible element. And what happens invisibly resembles what happens visibly. Visibly, a couple enters into a life-long covenant with each other through the total giving of oneself and the total accepting of the other through the marriage vows: "I, N., take you, N., to be my husband/wife. I promise to be faithful to you in good times and in bad, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life." The vows are the *Form of the Sacrament*. Invisibly, through their vows, God creates a *sacred bond* between the spouses until death. Through consummation of the marriage, this bond becomes *indissoluble* (unable to be dissolved). In a mysterious way, the couple is also given the grace to share and participate in the union between Christ and His Bride, the Church. Spouses are called, and given the grace, to express the total self-giving love of Christ to each other, so that they can learn to love each other the way that Christ loved His Bride, the Church. And just as Christ's love is fruitful, leading people to become and live as children of God, the love of spouses is also meant to be fruitful, through the begetting of children and leading them to live as children of God.

***Does the Church permit divorce?***

Jesus taught that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts. He also said that what God makes one, no one must separate. He even went so far as to say that if a husband divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery, and that if the wife divorces her husband and marries another, he commits adultery, precisely because the bond of marriage is unbreakable (Mark 10:2-12). The Church is faithful to the teaching of Jesus and cannot change His teaching because of convenience or popularity. The Church can help people to be faithful to Christ according to their circumstances, but the Church cannot change the teachings of the Lord.

The separation for the safety and wellbeing of a spouse and the children is sometimes necessary and can even be blessed by the Church. If the marriage was valid, however, the couple is still bound by their wedding vows, and to their sacred bond. There is always hope that things will improve, so that the family can be reunited.

While the Church does not permit divorce and remarriage, sometimes the Church can make a judgment that a marriage wasn't valid in the first place. For a valid marriage to take place, there are certain essential elements that must be present (freedom to marry, basic maturity, and the intention of fidelity, permanency, and children). If only one of these essential elements was missing in only one person, the marriage is considered invalid and can be declared as such when investigated by the tribunal in a diocese. The declaration that an apparent marriage was not valid because of the lack of one of these essential elements, after the investigation is finished, is called an *Annulment*. It is not a divorce. It is rather a declaration that the marriage never happened, although it seemed like it did at the time. Couples and individuals are always urged to see a priest in their difficulties, so that he can guide and help them to be faithful to Christ in their circumstances. In the end, a person is called to be faithful: If he or she is bound, he or she should remain faithful and not seek to enter another relationship, even if separation from a person is necessary. If one is not bound because of some invalidating factor, then the Church can help someone realize, and can declare, after investigation, that the he/she is not in fact bound, and therefore is free to pursue another relationship.

***Can a Catholic marry a non-Catholic?***

Yes, as long as they obtain the necessary permissions and dispensations from the Church to marry. In this case, the Catholic must agree to do all in his or her own power to raise the children Catholic. The non-Catholic spouse needs to be informed of this intention. Marrying someone of a different faith can be difficult, however, and the difficulties that will arise should be understood, seriously considered, and not underestimated. Sometimes the non-Catholic spouse freely becomes a faithful Catholic. This is a great blessing and help toward greater marital and family unity and the good of the children.

***What does the Church teach about sexuality?***

Many people think that the Church's teaching on sexuality is rather negative, restricting, judgmental, strict, arbitrary, and even oppressive. Even many Catholics, unfortunately, dissent from Church teaching because of this misunderstanding. However, the Church is faithful to Christ, and what Jesus teaches us about sexuality through the Church is actually very positive, beautiful, and liberating. It resonates with what is true, good, and most beautiful in the depths of our hearts.

The teaching of the Church on sexuality is very simple actually: Sexual intimacy finds its place and fulfillment in marriage, and is oriented toward union and procreation, or "love and life." Let us unpack these two dimensions of sexuality, since there is depth to each dimension.

First, sexuality is oriented toward the union of *love*. The Church teaches that the *marital act*, or sexual union, is supposed to be a *renewal of wedding vows*. That is, in the marital act, the couple is called to express in their bodies what they once expressed in their vows to each other before the altar. What did they say in their vows? In essence, "I give myself to you." And what are they called to echo in the consummation of their vows? "I give myself to you." Seen in this light, the marital act is something holy. It is fitting that a couple sees it as such, and that they pray beforehand. Sexual union within marriage, then, is about renewing and being a loving gift to each other, and enjoying that. The act becomes selfish, however, if it is motivated by lust and reduced to simply using the other for one's own momentary satisfaction. Further, if the couple, influenced by the culture, makes the maximization of pleasure their ultimate aim, then the sexual act becomes superficial, and even the thrill will get old quickly. Conjugal life, however, is so much deeper and is experienced as so much more satisfactory when deep and genuine love of the other is the ultimate aim, and when it is open to life. It is no wonder, then, that religious couples generally report being more satisfied with sexual intimacy than non-religious couples. The marital act is something holy and special. It is the unique act of the couple by which they renew and embody their wedding vows to each other.

Second, sexuality is oriented toward the begetting of children, toward *life*. It is truly amazing to think about how life comes forth from the marital act and the embodiment of the marital vows. This is how God intended life to come forth, not to come forth arbitrarily, mechanically, or in a laboratory, but springing forth from couple's married love. And, since each of us has an immortal soul that can only come from God, God directly creates the soul of each human being at the beginning of his/her existence, which means that the couple cooperates with God in bringing forth life. Because of this, the marital act should always be approached with the greatest reverence, appreciation, and awe.

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Because union and procreation, or “love and life,” is the twofold purpose of marriage and sexuality, the Church teaches that these two dimensions must always be united in practice. Any attempt to suppress one aspect is inherently disordered, unnatural, and sinful.

In our modern culture, there are many attempts to suppress one or both purposes of sexuality. The Church teaches that the following things are objectively sinful, because they inherently involve the suppression of one or both of the two purposes of the marital act, or because they seek sexual intimacy out of its proper context, marriage:

- *Cloning* and *In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)* are attempts to bring forth life apart from the marital act of love.
- The use of *Contraception* is inherently aimed at suppressing life in favor of love (though it diminishes this as well, since it restricts the total gift of self).
- *Self-gratification* (i.e., “masturbation”) is neither unitive or procreative. It’s aim is simply pleasure divorced from both purposes of the marital act.
- *Homosexual Acts* are neither unitive (in any naturally oriented way), nor procreative.
- *Premarital and Extramarital Sex* is sinful, because sexual intimacy only finds its proper place within marriage, because the marital act is supposed to be a renewal of wedding vows, which renewal a couple cannot make if they are not married; and because the marriage is the only proper context for the bringing forth and raising children.
- *Adultery* is a violation of the exclusivity of the marriage covenant.
- *Polygamy* likewise violates the exclusivity of marriage. It also introduces injustice and confusion for the wives and children in the family.
- The participation in, and inciting and promotion of, *Lust* through *Pornography* or sexually provocative books and media involves *adultery of the heart* (Mt. 5:27-30), addiction, reducing the opposite sex to their bodily attraction (making them into a kind of commodity), and disrespect.
- *Rape, Prostitution, Sexual Abuse of Minors, Sex Trafficking, and Sexual Harassment* are grave violations of the dignity, innocence and freedom of others, often resulting in great damage to the psyche and well being of others, often with having long-lasting impacts.

The Church’s teaching is fully consistent on these matters. Further, the Church doesn’t teach that all of these things are wrong just to make things more difficult for us. Instead, the Church teaches that these things are wrong because they fall short of the real thing (the beauty of sexual intimacy lived lovingly and virtuously within marriage), they won’t make us happy, and because she is faithful to the teaching of Christ, who knows what is best for us. Further, those who live according to Church Teaching are happy and fulfilled, and are spared from much pain and suffering. The Church is simply calling us to what is best for us, what will fulfill us, and is warning against things that lead us astray.

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Jesus also knows that we are weak in the area of sexuality, and many struggle with everything from occasionally watching or reading about lustful relationships to the plague of regular, serial sexual relationships. By both offering the depths of forgiveness and calling us to what is truly good, true, and beautiful, Jesus offers us liberation, conversion, clarity, self-mastery, and inner freedom in this area through the Church.

When clergy or lay leaders in the Church fall into sin in these areas, it is a terrible scandal. It does not nullify the teachings of Christ and the Church, but all the more reinforces the importance of them.

*Lust*, a disordered desire for sexual pleasure, is at the heart of all sexual sin. *Chastity* is sexual desire rightly ordered, to love and life within marriage. We are called to be aware of, and battle against, lust in all its forms, whether it be in thoughts, words, or actions. We are also called to *purity* in all dimensions of our life, in our thoughts, words, and actions. We cannot be pure by our own power. Purity is the result of God's grace healing and transforming us, and the virtue and discipline involved with cooperating with His grace. With time, we will more and more experience the happiness of inner integrity through the grace and help of Christ. Chastity teaches us how to love freely and authentically.

Pleasure is not bad. It is good that we delight in good things. Pleasure is a motivator and an accompaniment of delight for certain good actions. It is good that a married couple takes pleasure in the love and life dimensions of sexual intimacy. Pleasure isn't an end in itself, however. It needs to be ordered to the higher goods of love and life.

### ***Does the Church require couples to have as many children as possible?***

Marriage and sexual union are naturally ordered to children, and each child is a gift of God. Couples should be open to children, even many children, since they are all blessings. However, there can be many weighty reasons (financial, health, social, and psychological) to postpone pregnancy and limit the number of children. The Church permits couples to use *Natural Family Planning (NFP)* to postpone pregnancy and limit the number of children for good and weighty reasons. Couples can also use NFP to achieve pregnancy if they are having trouble getting pregnant. NFP is a modern, scientific method of monitoring the woman's fertility and of using this knowledge to aim for, or avoid, pregnancy by choosing to engage or refrain from the marital act during the time of the woman's fertility. It is completely different from contraception, since the couple is not suppressing any aspect of their fertility, since each and every marital act is open to life, and since it is not inherently wrong to have relations when the woman is infertile or to refrain when she is fertile. It is also worth noting that couples who use NFP report greater levels of satisfaction with it than couples using contraception, experience greater intimacy, have the same amount of relations as contracepting couples, and have a very low divorce rate. NFP also respects and works with the woman's cycle, in contrast to contraception, every form of which suppresses or ignores

the woman's cycle. NFP is healthy and avoids the health problems associated with various forms of contraception. NFP is inexpensive and best for the environment. NFP is also as or more effective at avoiding pregnancy and limiting children than most forms of contraception, when used for this purpose.

***What does the Church teach about "gay marriage"?***

Marriage is inherently related to the sexual difference and complementarity of men and women. The body of a man is inherently related to the body of a woman, and vice versa. Whereas, the bodies of men are not inherently oriented toward each other, nor the bodies of women to each other. Indeed, the reproductive system of our bodies is inherently relational and incomplete in just one gender. It is only complete in the union of a man and woman. We cannot detach marriage from sexuality. Otherwise there is no reason for it. Therefore, in the Church's eyes, "gay marriage" is not a reality, nor is it possible.

That being said, a small percentage of people struggle with *Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)*. Why they experience being attracted to the same gender is not fully known, although there seem to be many factors at play, and the factors are often different in different individuals. The ethics of homosexual behavior is not dependent on what the causes of SSA are, however.

The Church affirms the dignity of all people, and persons who struggle with same-sex attraction have no less dignity than anyone else. They should be shown respect and not be targeted, stigmatized, or ridiculed. Many of them are married (to a person of the opposite sex). Many of them have different ways of approaching their condition. Some regularly engage in homosexual activity. Some do not. Some form relationships. Some do not. Some promote "gay marriage." Many do not. Above all, persons who struggle with same-sex attraction are seeking to be understood, accepted, respected, and loved. The Church can offer this to them. However, the Church insists that they will not be happy or find what they are really looking for by engaging in homosexual behavior, which is inherently unnatural. Rather, they will find what they are looking for in being faithful to Christ and living according to His teaching. Having a same-sex attraction is not easy and is a special cross to carry. However, the Lord loves those who struggle, and wants to help them. Sexual intimacy only makes sense as ordered to love and life in marriage, however. Sexual activity outside of this context falls short of the nature and purpose of sexuality, and of God's plan for love and life. Jesus calls all, whether they have heterosexual or homosexual desires, to be faithful to God's plan for marriage and sexuality. He gives us the healing and strength we need to live in accordance with this plan, whatever our condition, and we will find the happiness we seek only by living according to His will for us.

The Church does not teach that civil laws should penalize those living in a same-sex relationship. At the same time, it is fitting that marriage as correctly understood (as

between a man and a woman) should be respected and affirmed in law and a country's ideals.

***What is God's plan for the family?***

The family is a communion of persons in the image of the Communion of Persons of the Trinity. The family is called to mirror the love and life of the Trinity. The family is also the *Domestic Church*. As such, the family is a community of faith in which the members of the family are called to fulfill their roles for the good of the whole family. Each member is enriched by the natural and spiritual gifts of the other members. Each member is also called to contribute to the good of the family through their service and through their own spiritual and natural gifts. The family is also the cell of society. The Christian family is called to be a community of light within the society.

***Why do persons in consecrated life live a life of vowed celibacy?***

Jesus Himself was celibate, and He said that some, like Himself, would give up marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus also said that this is not for everyone, but for those who feel called by God (Mt 19:10-12). Indeed, God calls most to marriage. He calls some to give up marriage for the kingdom of God though. These seek to direct their entire love toward God, as if to a spouse. They also make themselves more available for service to the Church and the world. All vocations in the Church should support and enrich each other. Consecrated men and women can inspire lay persons to seek God first in their lives. Holy married couples can provide consecrated persons with an image the kind of spousal relationship they are called to have spiritually with God. The Church also knows by experience that the different vocations flourish and struggle together. When marriages are going well, vocations to priesthood and religious life also tend to be healthy, and vice versa.

Jesus also said that in heaven, people do not marry nor are given in marriage (Mk 12:18-27). So, consecrated souls seek to live here and now what will be in the life to come. They thus bear witness to the primacy of God and the coming kingdom.

**SCRIPTURAL READINGS**

John 2:1-12      *(the wedding feast of Cana)*

Mark 10:2-12      *(Jesus on marriage and divorce)*

“Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from the law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.” —Rom 7:2-3

“For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.”

—Mal 2:16

Ephesians 5:21-33      *(St. Paul on how married couples should reflect the love of Christ to each other)*

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” —Mt 5:27-30

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” —Mt 6:22-23

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” —Mt 5:8

1 Cor 6:12-20      *(St. Paul on our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit)*

Matthew 19:10-12      *(Jesus on those called to give up marriage for the kingdom of heaven)*

