

Sacraments and Life

Through the Sacraments, Jesus Christ desires to be with us in a powerful and life giving manner at the most important moments in our lives. Consider the connections between Sacraments and life experiences such as those listed. Are you able to discover any other connections when you reflect upon your own life?

1. Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism	<i>Birth, Community Belonging, Beginning</i>
Confirmation	<i>Growth, Commitment, Service, Strength</i>
Eucharist	<i>Nourishment, Thanksgiving, Life, Self Giving, Love, Unity, Reconciliation with God, people and all creation</i>

2. Sacraments of Healing

Reconciliation	<i>Relationships, Forgiveness, Healing, Conversion</i>
Anointing the Sick	<i>Suffering, Healing, Comfort, Death and Eternal Life</i>

3. Sacraments of Commitment

Holy Orders	<i>Loving Commitment, Service, Ministry</i>
Marriage	<i>Loving and Being Loved, New Life, Commitment, Friendship, Family and Community, Growth</i>

Sacraments, Faith, Human Freedom

Sacraments aren't magic. They depend on our free, loving and living response in faith.

We need to be doing our best, each day, to live the meaning and the reality of each Sacrament. For example, Baptism is not an event that is 'over and done with' when the rite is completed. The truth of our identity as baptised people (that is people full of the loving Spirit of our God) is something that grows throughout life, moment by moment, with every decision that we make to become more or less like Jesus Christ. Marriage is a lifetime journey that begins on a wedding day. Two people are called to love through the joys and disappointments of a lifetime.

Sent out to be Christ in the World

The seven Sacrament are celebrated with the Church community gathered in the name of Jesus. He is the One who acts through each Sacrament. Anyone who receives a Sacrament is empowered and sent out to be Christ for the world.

For Reflection:

What does it mean for you, and your community, 'to be Christ for the world'?

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Imprimatur: + Most Reverend Leslie R Tomlinson DD Bishop of Sandhurst.

15th October 2012

Sacraments ~ Part 1

Introducing Sacraments

Through the Sacraments, Jesus Christ desires to be with us in a powerful and life-giving manner at the most important moments in our lives. This is the first in a series of articles exploring 'Sacraments', their meaning and significance, particularly within the Catholic tradition.



Sacrament

"The traditional definition of a sacrament, in essence going right back to the fourth-century Christian Bishop St Augustine of Hippo, is that a sacrament is 'an outward sign of an inward grace'... it is a visible symbol, something one can see and experience. But the reality which it symbolises is 'inward', that is to say it transforms the person from within".

**Traditionally, 'grace', means God's presence, acting within us.*

(*Michael Walsh, The Basics: Roman Catholicism, London: Routledge, 2005, pages 106-107)

Creation

'The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator.'

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 341)

All creation and all of life is potentially sacramental, able to give us signs and symbols of God's life and grace, that can also be a way of God's love and grace being present to us. It is possible to see glimpses of the divine in everyday 'signs and symbols'. They lead us to reflect upon life's deeper realities and its meaning.

For Reflection

Have you known something of God's presence and beauty through experiencing...

- The night sky (far away from city lights)?
- Sunrise or sunset? The ocean?
- Fire on a winter's night? Rain after the 'long dry'?
- Fresh flowing water? Fresh fruit on a summer's day?
- Loving and being loved by another person?
- The birth of a child?

Jesus Christ, God with Us, sent by the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit

‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God,’
wrote Poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

And God is especially present in Christ, so Jesus himself is a sacrament
of God’s presence to the world, that is,
he makes God present to the world in a visible form.’
(Michael Walsh, The Basics: Roman Catholicism, page 107)

- *Jesus is the greatest sacrament of God. In him and through everything he says and does, he reveals ‘God with us’, Emmanuel.*
- *‘God so loved the world that he gave his only son’ (John 3:16)*
- *‘The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us’ (John 1:14)*
- *‘In him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28)*
- *‘And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth’ (John 14:16-17)*

The Church

Because we human beings cannot ‘go it alone’, Jesus formed a community of disciples. The Church, filled with the Holy Spirit, is called to be a sacrament of God’s life and love.

The Church should help us find ‘God in all things’. Her task is to be a sign and a means of encountering Jesus alive in the world and its people.

‘The Church in Christ, is a sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race...’
(Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, paragraph 1)

The Word of God

The sacred scriptures are also a sacrament, a sign and symbol, the Word of God in Jesus Christ, who is present in this Word: Jesus Christ ‘is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in church.’

(Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 7)



Seven Sacraments

‘In Catholic thought there are some particular actions, which, when performed within the context of the Church, convey grace, make God’s presence a deeper reality for the individual. These are Sacraments. Through them God enters and transforms the individuals who receive the Sacrament.’

(*Michael Walsh, The Basics: Roman Catholicism, page 107)

The Catholic tradition recognises seven definitive moments when God acts directly and powerfully in our lives, which we call Sacraments. Among these, Eucharist is ‘the sacrament of sacraments’ (St Thomas Aquinas).

They are:

- *Baptism*
- *Reconciliation*
- *Eucharist*
- *Confirmation*
- *Holy Orders*
- *Marriage*
- *Anointing of the Sick*



These Sacraments originate in the life and ministry of Jesus, the One who acts directly and graciously through every Sacrament. Each is an occasion of the in breaking of God into our lives, a powerful moment of divine presence and grace. Each celebrates a high point in the ongoing encounter between God and human beings, and the sacramentality of all of life. The purpose of the Sacraments is that we may become more like Jesus and in a closer relationship to God in Jesus.

‘The seven Sacraments are signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the Church which is his Body.’

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, par 774)

‘The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to worship God.’

(Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy paragraph 59)

For Reflection:

Consider one Sacrament which has been part of your life’s journey.

If you are preparing to receive a Sacrament, make this the focus of your reflection.

What happens when you receive this Sacrament?

What are the symbols and action?

What do you understand about the meaning and importance of this Sacrament?