

## **The Seven Catholic Sacraments**

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A sacrament is an outward efficacious sign instituted by Christ that bestows upon all creation His transforming Grace. Jesus Christ himself is THE sacrament, as He gave His life to save all humanity. Our Lord's incarnation and human nature is the outward sign or the instrument of His Divinity. It is through His humanity that the life of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit come to us as Grace through the Sacraments. It is Jesus Christ alone who mediates the Sacraments which allows His abundant grace to flow into Holy Mother Church and all His faithful.

The word sacrament is a direct translation of the Greek word *mysterion*. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes seven Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The three Sacraments of Christian Initiation are Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The two Sacraments of Healing are Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, and the two Sacraments of Vocation are Holy Orders and Matrimony. Three Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, are given once, as they render a permanent seal or character upon one's soul (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 4:30, Revelations 7:3).

Each Sacrament consists of a visible external rite, which is composed of matter and form, the matter being the action, such as the pouring of water, and the form being the words spoken by the minister. Each sacramental rite confers a special ecclesial effect and sacramental grace appropriate for each Sacrament. The Sacraments occur at pivotal events and give meaning to a person's life.

### **Baptism**

Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, as we are born of the water and the Spirit. Baptism is necessary for salvation (John 3:5), and conveys a permanent sign that the new Christian is a child of God. Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan River by Saint John the Baptist (Mark 1:9-11). Baptism is prefigured in the Old Testament through the saving of Noah and his family during the Flood (Genesis 7:12-23, 1 Peter 3:20-21), and Moses crossing of the Red Sea during the Exodus, leaving captivity for the Promised Land (Exodus 14:1-22).

The Greek word "baptizein" means to "immerse, plunge, or dip." The infant or candidate is anointed with the oil of catechumens, followed by the parents, godparents, or candidate making the profession of faith. The essential rite of Baptism consists of the minister immersing the baby or person in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The infant or candidate is then anointed with sacred chrism.

What has taken place in Baptism is indicated by the rites that follow it, the clothing in the white garment and giving of the lighted candle: the baptized person has "put on Christ" and has now become light. Here are three Scriptural sources in the New Testament (See also Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22; Acts 1:21-22; Romans 6:3-4; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:11-13, 1 Peter 3:21):

### **Confirmation**

Chrismation is the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit whom Christ Jesus sent (John 16:7). Jesus instructed his Apostles that they "will receive the power of the Holy Spirit" and called upon the Apostles to be His "witnesses to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). At the Pentecost, the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), and began to spread the Word of God. The Acts of the Apostles is often called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

The rite of Confirmation is anointing the forehead with chrism, together with the laying on of the minister's hands and the words, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." The recipient receives the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2-3). On occasion one may receive one or more of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

The ecclesial effect and sacramental grace of the Sacrament give the recipient the strength and character to witness for Jesus Christ. In the Roman rite this Sacrament is administered by the Bishop to children from age 7 to 18, but generally to adolescents, for example, to a graduating class of grade school children. Other key Scriptural sources for Confirmation are the following (See also Acts 1:4-5, 2:1-4, 2:38, 10:44-48):

### **Communion**

Eucharistia means thanksgiving, and the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life." The Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated in the liturgy of the Mass. The Mass is the Eucharist or principal sacramental celebration of the Church, established by Jesus at the Last Supper, in which the mystery of our salvation through participation in the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Christ is renewed and accomplished. The word "Mass" comes from the Latin *missa*, as it refers to the mission or sending forth of the faithful following the celebration, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives.

The essential signs of the Sacrament are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked during the Sacrifice of the Mass, and the priest pronounces the words of consecration spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper: "This is my body...This is the cup of my blood..." (Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Jesus died once on the cross in sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:25-28). But Jesus is present for all time, as He is the eternal Son of God. What He did once in history also then exists for all eternity. What happened in time goes beyond time. In the heart of Jesus He is always giving Himself to the Father for us, as He did on the Cross. When we celebrate the Mass, the sacrifice of the cross, that happened once in history but is present for all eternity, that same reality is made present in mystery.<sup>3</sup>

The bread and wine through Transubstantiation become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, and we receive the Real Presence of Jesus when we receive Holy Communion. Our soul is nourished, helping us to become like Christ. The Eucharist is the heart and source of community within the Church. Receiving Holy Communion with others during the Mass brings unity of the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

### **Confession**

Jesus Christ gave His Apostles the power to forgive sins. The Sacrament is also known as the Sacrament of Conversion, Forgiveness, Penance, or Reconciliation.

The sacrament involves three steps: the penitent's contrition or sorrow for his sins, the actual confession to a priest and absolution, and then penance or restitution for your sins. The experience leads one to an interior conversion of the heart. Jesus describes the process of conversion and penance in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24).

The penitent confesses his sins to the priest in the confessional, and the priest then gives absolution to the repentant soul, making the Sign of the Cross, and saying the words "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It is Christ Jesus through the priest who forgives your sins. As the penitent must make restitution or satisfaction for his sins, the priest gives a penance to the forgiven one, usually prayer, fasting, or almsgiving (1 Peter 4:8).

Confession gives one a wonderful sense of freedom and peace from the burden of sin. Sorrow, affliction, and a desire for conversion follow the remorse of sin in those with a contrite heart. Some believe we can confess our sins privately to God. However, in this Sacrament of Healing we can be assured of God's mercy, love and forgiveness made truly present in the absolution of our sins. Moreover, humans are social beings and the humbling experience of unburdening your soul to someone, of exposing your weak nature, and then being

accepted for who you are and what you have done by having your sins forgiven brings one an incredible sense of relief! The experience brings a sense of gratitude to our generous Lord for his love, compassion and mercy.

As one is to be in the state of grace before receiving Holy Communion, the child makes his first Confession before his first Communion, generally at the age of reason. Here are three Scriptural references on Penance (See also Matthew 16:18-19, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38):

### **Anointing of the Sick**

Is the Sacrament given to ailing Christians, and the special graces received unite the sick person to the passion of Christ. The Sacrament consists of the anointing of the forehead and hands of the patient with blessed oil, with the minister saying, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up."

The ecclesial effect of this sacrament, once called Extreme Unction, is incorporation into the healing Body of Christ, with a spiritual healing of the soul, and at times healing of the body. The sacramental grace helps us to accept sickness as a purifying cross sent by God, and the grace even to accept death if that is God's will.

Jesus healed the blind and the sick, as well as commissioned His Apostles to do so, such as the following sources. See Mathew 8:1-17 and Matthew 4: 23-24

### **Holy Orders**

The Sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Jesus to His Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church to the end of time. Saint Thomas Aquinas makes the important point that only Christ is the true priest, the others serving as His ministers (Hebrews 8:4). Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, and priests and deacons are his assistants in rendering service. Men are ordained to the priesthood in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, as the Sacrament confers upon the priest the character to act in the person of Christ - in persona Christi.

Holy Orders is the Sacrament of Apostolic ministry. The rite consists of the Bishop's imposition of hands on the head of the priest-candidate with the consecrating prayer asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the gifts of the ministry. There are three dimensions to ministry, that of Bishop, Priesthood, and the Diaconate. See Matthew 16:18-19, John 21:15-17, Romans 10:14-15, 2 Timothy 1:6, and Titus 1:5.

### **Marriage**

The union of a man and a woman is natural. The natural language of the human body is such that the man gives to the woman and the woman receives the man. The love and friendship between a man and a woman grow into a desire for marriage. The Sacrament of marriage gives the couple the grace to grow into a union of heart and soul, to provide stability for themselves and their children. Children are the fruit and bond of a marriage.

The bond of marriage between a man and a woman lasts all the days of their lives, and the form of the rite consists of the mutual exchange of vows by a couple, both of whom have been baptized. The priest or deacon serves as a witness to this sacred Sacrament in the Roman rite; with the couple serving as ministers of the Sacrament itself. The matter follows later through consummation of the marriage act.

Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God, and concludes with a vision of the "wedding-feast of the Lamb (Revelations 19:7, 9)". The bond of marriage is compared to God's undying love for Israel in the Old Testament, and Christ's love for His Church in the New Testament. Jesus stresses the importance of the marriage bond in His Ministry (Matthew 19:6, 8). The importance of marriage is substantiated by the presence of Christ at the wedding feast of Cana, where He began His public ministry at the request of His mother Mary by performing His first miracle (John 2). It is the Apostle Paul who identifies the marriage of man and woman with the unity of Christ and His Church.