

11. Introduction to the Sacraments

God freely offers his gift of sanctifying grace to us. The seven sacraments of the Church are outward signs, instituted by Christ, that confer grace upon those who receive them.

Key terms:

Sacrament:	“an efficacious sign (capable of producing the desired effect) of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us by the work of the Holy Spirit.” (#1131)
Grace	A share in God’s life and friendship that is his free and undeserved gift to us so that we can answer his call to become his adopted children.
Sacramental grace:	The sacramental grace given by the Holy Spirit and the particular grace specific to each of the sacraments.
Sacramentals:	1) Blessings conferred upon individuals, objects, and places, which contribute to disposing us to receive and cooperate with grace; 2) material objects that remind us of God, his saints, or the sacraments which, when blessed by a priest or deacon, can provide actual grace through prayer.
Works of mercy:	Acts of love for neighbour that meet specific spiritual and physical needs.

THE SACRAMENTS IN SCRIPTURE

BAPTISM

The first and foundational sacrament for the early Church.

Matthew 3:16; 28:19;

Mark 1:8, 16:16;

John 3:5;

Acts 1:4-5; 2:38; 8:16; 8:36-38; 11:16; 22:16;

Romans 6:3-4;

1 Corinthians 12:13;

Ephesians 5:25-26;

Colossians 2:12; and

1 Peter 3:20-21.

CONFIRMATION

Acts 2 The first mention of the completion of baptism by the coming of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:3-6 baptism and confirmation are two separate, sacramental signs.

Acts 8:14-17; 19:3-6

Hebrews 6:2 baptism and laying on of hands (confirmation) are seen as separate as well.

John 14:16.

EUCCHARIST

Matthew 26:26-29 The Eucharist is clearly established at the Last Supper, as recounted in.

Additional Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42; and 1 Corinthians 11:24-27 The Breaking of the Bread

PENANCE

Matthew 16:19 and John 20:21-23 Jesus gave the authority to forgive sin to the apostles. We believe this authority has been passed down through bishops and priests to the present day as part of the power to “bind and loosen.”

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

James 5:13-15 calls for prayers by the elders and anointing with oil for the sick.

HOLY ORDERS

Luke 22:19 Jesus instituted the sacrament of holy orders at the Last Supper when he commissioned his apostles by saying, “Do this in remembrance of me”

Acts 6:3-6; 13:2-3; 1 Timothy 3:1; 3:8-9; 4:16; 5:17-19; 5:22.

MATRIMONY

John 2:1-11 Jesus’ first miracle was performed at the wedding feast of Cana

Matthew 19:10-11 and Ephesians 5:31-32 matrimony is to be a sign of Christ and the Church, as well as a special bond between man and woman.

The difference between a sign and a sacrament?

A sign is something that can point to the presence of something (Supermarket); it can be an action or gesture to convey something (a salute); a board or poster (a STOP sign); something that stands for a word or phrase (+, -, x, €,) etc. etc. A sacrament is an efficacious sign i.e. “they reveal and make present the reality they signify.”

How many sacraments are there?

“There are seven sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.”

Who instituted the sacraments?

“Adhering to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, to the apostolic traditions and to the consensus ... of the Fathers, we profess that the sacraments of the new law were ... all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Who oversees and celebrates the sacraments?

Jesus entrusted the sacraments to the Church. “Throughout his earthly life, Christ’s words and deeds anticipated the power of his Paschal Mystery. Sacraments confer the grace that comes forth from Jesus Christ and that appears in the life of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

What is the purpose of the sacraments?

Through the sacraments the Holy Spirit draws us closer to Jesus Christ and makes us partakers in the life of the Holy Trinity. “Jesus gave us the Sacraments to call us to worship God, to build up the Church, to deepen our faith, to show us how to pray, to connect us with the living Tradition of the Church and to sanctify us.”

Are the seven sacraments grouped together in any way?

The seven sacraments are grouped together in the following way:

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation

- Baptism
- Confirmation
- Holy Eucharist

These are the sacraments of foundation for every Christian life. They signify respectively our new life in Christ; our strengthening; and the reception of food for eternal life. These sacraments complete our membership of the Body of Christ. They ground the universal call to holiness among the People of God and our participation in the mission of evangelization.

The Sacraments of Healing

- Penance and Reconciliation
- Anointing of the Sick

Through these two sacraments the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, continues Christ’s work of healing and salvation among its members.

The Sacraments at the Service of Communion

- Holy Orders
- Matrimony

The salvation of others is the goal of these sacraments. Recipients offer themselves in service to other people. Men ordained into the apostolic ministry and spouses in marriage are entrusted with a particular mission in the Church.

INTENTION, FORM & MATTER

All sacraments must have proper **matter**, **form**, and **intention** in order for a sacrament to be validly celebrated.

FORM

Refers to the formula, words or prayers that convey the meaning or terms of the act as prescribed by the Church.

- Sometimes the form is a simple subject-verb phrase using the words of Christ (“This is my body...”, “I baptize you”, “I absolve you...”, etc.);

- In these cases, the priest is acting “in persona Christi” (in the person of Christ) when he is conferring the sacrament;
- But sometimes the minister acts on behalf of Christ and His Church when he uses the formula (“Receive the Holy Spirit...”, “Through this holy anointing...”);
- In only one sacrament (Matrimony) do the ministers act in their own name when they minister the sacrament to each other (“I take you to be my wife/husband”).

MATTER

Refers to the material or tangible element/substance through which the sacramental act takes place.

- Sometimes sacramental matter is actually a material substance (like water for Baptism or bread and wine for the Eucharist);
- But sometimes “matter” is a spiritual act (like the acts of a penitent in Confession or the consent of the couple in Matrimony);
- In either case, the matter is something real, something tangible and is the means by which the sacramental action takes place.

INTENTION

The *intention* by which the minister of the sacrament intends to say and do what the Church requires in celebrating the sacrament, ensuring the conditions for its validity are upheld.

EXPLORE!

Explore with candidates the Matter and Form for each of the seven sacraments. (See notes)
 How do the sacraments draw the faithful into a fuller relationship with the Lord and the Church as the Body of Christ?
 Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the sacraments.
 How do believers witness to the sacraments in their daily lives?

Introduction to the Sacraments — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why is the ministry of the priest essential for us to lead a sacramental life?
2. In what ways can frequently receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation help us to lead a sacramental life?
3. How can we say that the eucharist is the place where we meet Christ?

PRAAYER

Pray Psalm 18 or Psalm 23 .

or

Gospel Reflection: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Year A Mt. 1:18-24

Year B Lk. 1:26-38

Year C Lk. 1:39-44

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Introduction to the Sacraments

Scripture

- Ex. 12:1-17 As a sign of fidelity, God institutes the Passover as a perpetual ritual among the Israelites.
- Ex. 16:1-15 God sustains the Israelites with manna, providing for their needs daily by that special bread.
- Ex. 31:13-14 Keeping the Sabbath as a sign of sanctification
- Lv. 23:1-44 God establishes a cycle of feasts, celebrated in holy assembly using material signs.
- Jn. 6:53-59 Whoever eats Jesus' flesh and drinks his blood will abide in him and live forever.
- Eph. 1:220-23 Christ in glory is Head of the Church, his Body, which is the fullness of Christ.
- 1 Thess 5:16-18 Be always joyful, prayerful and thankful.
- 2 Tim 3:16-17 Inspired by God, Scripture is our teacher and guide to learn holiness.
- 2 Pt 1:3-4 God has called us to everlasting life and to partake of his own nature.

Catechism

- 798 The sacraments give growth and healing to Christ's members.
- 977-978 Baptism, the first sacrament of the forgiveness of sins.
- 6, 1074-75 The role of the sacraments in catechesis.
- 1076 The fruits of the Paschal mystery come through the liturgy and sacraments.
- 1082-1092 How the sacraments communicate the divine blessings and graces of the Trinity.
- 1113 The sacraments are the focus of the Church's entire liturgical life.
- 1114 The sacraments were instituted by Christ
- 1118 The sacraments are of the Church and for the Church.
- 1127-1128 The effects of the sacraments and the grace they signify.
- 1129 The sacraments are necessary for the salvation of all believers.
- 1324-1327 The Eucharist is the source, centre, and summit of our sacramental life.
- 1134 Sacramental grace.
- 1378-1398 Worship of the Eucharist; reception of Holy Communion and its effects.
- 1457-1458 Receiving Holy Communion unworthily and the value of frequent Confession.
- 1655-1657 The family as the domestic church.
- 1674-1676 Christians fulfil their vocation to holiness as members of the Church.
- 2030 Christians fulfil their vocations to holiness as members of the Church.
- 2691 Liturgical prayer and adoration of the Eucharist properly take place in churches.

MATTER AND FORM OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

The Sacrament of Baptism

- Matter: Water.
- Form: “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.
- Ordinary Minister: Bishop / Priest / Deacon.
- Extraordinary Minister: In danger of death or extreme circumstances, anyone can baptize, as long as they do so with the intention of the Church.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

- Matter: The acts of the penitent: 1/contrition, 2/ confession, and 3/ doing penance or making amends for sins.
- Form: The action of the priest in pronouncing the prayer of absolution and saying the essential words, “I absolve you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. The formula is longer, but these words are essential.
- Ordinary Minister: Bishop or Priest.
(Deacons do not hear confessions because they are ordained for service, not consecrated for the priestly ministry.)

The Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist

- Matter: Unleavened wheat bread and grape wine.
- Form: “This is my body” and “This is the cup of my blood” (These are the essential “words of institution” of the Last Supper.)
- Ordinary Minister: Bishop or Priest (for consecration); Deacon (for distribution)
- Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist: laity who are trained and officially delegated to distribute the Eucharist.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

- Matter: Anointing with the Oil of Chrism and the laying on of hands.
- Form: “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit”.
- Ordinary Minister: Bishop or Pastor of a parish at Easter.
- Extraordinary Minister: Priest (with delegation of the bishop).

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

- Matter: The laying on of hands by a bishop.
- Form: The long, consecratory prayer of the ordination ceremony
- (the prayers for the 3 grades of holy orders—deacon, priest, bishop—are unique to each office.)
- Ordinary Minister: A bishop.

The Sacrament of Matrimony

- Matter: The mutual consent of the couple and their promise to live together as husband and wife in a lifelong union.
- Form: “I take you...” (spoken as a vow) or “I do” (spoken as an affirmation of the vow recited by the representative of the Church).
- Ordinary Ministers: The baptized man and woman who give the consent to each other.
Note: The presence of a bishop, priest, or deacon plus two witnesses are also required by the Church for a valid marriage of two Catholics.

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

- Matter: Anointing with the Oil of the Sick and the laying on of hands.
- Form: “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you
by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and may the Lord who frees you from sin, save
you and raise you up.”
- Ordinary Minister: Bishop or Priest
(Deacons do not confer this anointing because they are ordained for service, not consecrated for the priestly ministry.)