



CHAPTER 16

The Seven Sacraments

We know that Adam and Eve lost the gift of grace for all mankind by their disobedience to God's commands. God sent his only Son to bring grace back to the world. How? By dying on the Cross as a sacrifice for our sins, a sacrifice accepted by the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

But this raises an important question: How did Jesus plan to give this grace to us, to every person who will ever live? The New Testament and Sacred Tradition give us the answer: Jesus gave us the seven sacraments as the ways to receive the grace of God.

What Is a Sacrament?

The sacraments are seven visible signs, or ceremonies, that were instituted (given) by Christ to give us grace. They must not be thought of as "magical rites" that give grace as a vending machine would give soda! They are sacred ceremonies in which we are truly called by Jesus to accept his love and forgiveness, to grow in our relationship with him and with the whole Church, with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Each of the sacraments has special words or actions that bear a message for us. We are all familiar with signs that are meant to give us a message. For example, when we see the flag of the United States, we know that it represents

that country. We all understand a smile to be a message of joy, while tears are most often a message of sorrow. Words are verbal signs. For example, if I say the word "dog" to you, you understand it as a message about a four-legged furry animal that barks.

The Signs of the Sacraments

Well, the signs of the sacraments bring us their own special messages too. For example, the sign of Baptism tells us that someone is being freed from original sin and being made a child of God. The sign of the Holy Eucharist tells us that bread and wine are being changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Once we learn what the signs are, it is quite easy to remember what each of the sacraments does for our souls.

But unlike ordinary human signs, the sacraments received power from Jesus to *do* what they tell us. This can be quite confusing so let us look at it a little more closely. Consider the ordinary *stop sign*. Whenever we see this red eight-sided sign we stop at an intersection because this is what it reminds us to do. But it does not have the power to make us stop; we must do that ourselves. Well, if the stop sign had the power of a sacrament, it would be able to make us stop as soon as we saw it. This is difficult to understand because the sacraments

are *mysterries* of faith, like the Blessed Trinity or the Incarnation. We accept and firmly believe in them because God has revealed them to us. One of the most ancient titles for the sacraments (still used in the prayers at Mass) is *sacred mysterries*.

So when a priest performs the signs of a sacrament, the message they proclaim is also carried out. For example, when the priest says, “This is my Body. . . . This is the cup of my Blood. . . .” over the bread and wine at Mass, they really do become the Body and Blood of the Lord, because Jesus gave him the power to do this.

Here is a chart that will help you learn the matter and form of the sacraments.

BAPTISM: The pouring of water while saying:

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

CONFIRMATION: The bishop’s imposing his hand on the person and anointing him with chrism (blessed oil) while these words are said: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”

HOLY EUCHARIST: The gifts of bread and wine over which the priest says: “This is my Body. . . . This is the cup of my Blood. . . .”

PENANCE: The verbal confession of sins to a priest, after which he says: “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*”

ANOINTING: Anointing with oil of the sick while saying: “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.* May the Lord, who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up. *Amen.*”

HOLY ORDERS: The bishop’s laying on of hands followed by his saying: “We ask you, all-powerful Father, give these servants of yours the dignity of the presbyterate. Renew the Spirit of holiness within them. By your divine gift may they attain the second order in the hierarchy and exemplify right conduct in their lives.”

MATRIMONY: The exchange of wedding vows between a Christian man and a Christian woman.

The Gift of Sacramental Grace

Besides giving us sanctifying grace the sacraments give us a special grace for our journey to Heaven. It is called *sacramental grace*, and it helps us in various ways, depending upon from which sacrament it comes. The following chart shows us these different sacramental graces:

BAPTISM: Gives us the grace to live a holy life.

CONFIRMATION: Gives us the grace to be strong in faith and loyal to Jesus as we journey to Heaven.

HOLY EUCHARIST: Gives us the grace to love Jesus with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

PENANCE: Gives us the grace to overcome our sinful desires and actions.

ANOINTING: Gives us the grace to accept our sicknesses, and to die a good death.

HOLY ORDERS: Gives priests the grace to live good lives dedicated to preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments.

MATRIMONY: Gives a husband and a wife the grace of loving each other until death and of being good parents.

Words to Know:

sacrament sign
sacred mysteries sacramental grace

Q. 88 *What are the sacraments?*

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace instituted by Jesus Christ to make us holy.

Q. 89 *Why are the sacraments efficacious signs of grace?*

The sacraments are *signs* of grace because those aspects of them which we can perceive with our senses *signify* or indicate that invisible grace which they confer; and they are *efficacious* signs of grace because by signifying grace they also actually *confer* it upon the soul.

Q. 90 *What kinds of grace do the sacraments give?*

The sacraments give sanctifying grace and sacramental grace.

Q. 91 *What is sacramental grace?*

Sacramental grace is a right to special graces which are necessary for us in achieving the special purpose of each sacrament.

Q. 92 *Who gave to the sacraments the power of conferring grace?*

Jesus Christ, true God and true man, gave the sacraments the power of conferring grace, which he himself merited for us by his Passion and death.

Q. 93 *How do the sacraments make us holy?*

The sacraments make us holy either by giving us the first sanctifying grace which takes away sin or by increasing that grace which we already possess.

Q. 94 *Which sacraments give us first grace?*

First grace is given to us by Baptism and Confession. Hence they are called "sacraments of the dead" because they give the life of grace to souls that had been dead through sin.

Q. 95 *What sacraments increase grace in us?*

The sacraments which increase grace in us are Confirmation, the Eucharist, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. These are called "sacraments of the living" because when we receive them we ought to be spiritually alive by the grace of God.

Q. 96 *What should we do to preserve the grace of the sacrament?*

To preserve the grace of the sacrament we must cooperate by our way of living, doing good and avoiding evil.

Q. 97 *What things are required for a sacrament?*

For a sacrament, three things are required: the *matter* of the sacrament, the *form* of the sacrament, and the *minister* of the sacrament, who must have the intention of doing what the Church intends.

Q. 98 *What is the matter of a sacrament?*

The matter of a sacrament is the sensible element of which it is composed, such as water in Baptism.

Q. 99 *What is the form of a sacrament?*

The form of a sacrament is the set of words which the minister must pronounce in the very act of applying the matter of the sacrament.

Q. 100 *Who is the minister of a sacrament?*

The minister of a sacrament is the person who has the power to confer the sacrament in the name of Jesus Christ and by his authority.