

## **THE SACRAMENTS**

**The Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit.**

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 1131)

**Sacraments are powers that come forth from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in His Body, the Church. They are the master works of God in the new and everlasting covenant.**

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 1116)

**Celebrated worthily in faith, the Sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ Himself is at work. . . . As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to His power.**

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 1127)

## OVERVIEW

1. The sacraments have a visible and invisible reality, a reality open to all the human senses that is grasped with “the eyes of faith.” The visible reality we see in the Sacraments is their outward action and the way that action is performed. The invisible reality we cannot see is the grace which is bestowed upon the recipient, that grace which is freely given by God by which He offers a share in His Life, and shows us His favor and will for our salvation. Our response to that grace should be the living in imitation of Christ in our daily lives.
2. During His earthly ministry, Jesus preached and taught with authority and performed healings and miracles. Jesus continues His saving works through the Sacraments of the Church. In the Sacraments, the Church offers to each of us the saving power of God which Jesus, gained for us through His suffering, death and resurrection as we journey in faith with the communion of believers.
3. When the Church speaks of the Sacraments it refer to seven moments in Catholic life that were established out of the example and the ministry of Jesus as signs of God’s presence: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony and Holy Orders. In these seven moments, the Church tries to capture the fact that all of life is sacramental, because all of life points to the glory and grace of God, and to the unity of His people.
4. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the moments of Christian life<sup>1</sup>; they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian life of faith. In this, there is a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life.<sup>2</sup>
5. The Sacraments are visible, concrete “signs” of God’s loving relationship with us and his desire to transform our lives. The signs or rituals allow us, through the senses, to think about those values to faith but more so to experience through the senses the very truth of the graces promised in the reception of the sacrament. These rituals or ceremonies are highly symbolic; through an environment of objects that are seen, tasted or heard, we are drawn even closer into the mystery of God who communicates with us to experience the spiritual by external reinforcement for things not seen.
6. These sacramental ceremonies point back to Christ and look forward to salvation in Him, and they offer grace to live in hope today. For a Catholic, our sacraments are meaningful to the extent that people know what they point to in the past (Christ), celebrate in the present (sanctifying grace), and affirm what they point to in the future (salvation). Sacraments would have no meaning or effect for an unbeliever.
7. The Sacraments by their very nature are “efficacious signs,” that is, they are effective. When the sacramental signs are celebrated, they reveal and make present the reality they signify. They are efficacious because Jesus is at work in

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<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, S.Th. III, 65,1

<sup>2</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 341, para. 1210) Print.

- them; He is the guarantee of the sacramental graces that transform us. As we will see in the study of the individual Sacraments, each Sacrament brings with it a particular grace according to the purpose and sanctifying effect of that Sacrament.
8. By God's will, the Church oversees and celebrates the Sacraments. Christ's words and deeds throughout His life anticipated the power of His redemption of mankind. Sacraments confer the graces that come forth from Christ and appear in the life of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.
  9. "The purpose of the Sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the Body of Christ (the Church) and finally to give worship to God."<sup>3</sup> The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the Sacraments.<sup>4</sup> The Church founded by Christ, and led by the Holy Spirit, is a kind of sacrament since it is a sign and instrument of the grace that unites us to God and to one another.<sup>5</sup>
  10. Within the context of the seven Sacraments, we celebrate three key elements of our lives in faith: Initiation (3), Healing (2) and Service (2).
  11. The **Sacraments of Initiation** are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Through these three Sacraments, a person is reborn in the image of the Risen Lord (Baptism), confirmed in Christ's mission as a light to the nations (Confirmation), and joined more closely to the community through the food of Jesus' table (Eucharist).
  12. The **Sacraments of Healing** are Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. Personal sins are forgiven and the person is restored to wholeness as a child of God. Sin is not just something that affects an individual; it also makes him/her less in the community than Jesus wants him/her to be. The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is for the strengthening one's faith in time of illness and to remind the community of believers to pray for and with them.
  13. The **Sacraments of Service** are Matrimony and Holy Orders. They are directed toward the salvation of others; they confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to strengthen the family as God intended and build up the people of God.<sup>6</sup>

## Key Phrases

- ◆ The Holy Spirit prepares the faithful for the Sacraments by helping them to welcome the Word of God in faith.
- ◆ The Sacraments communicate to each person a participation in God's life, and growth of love and witness in the Church.

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<sup>3</sup> Const. of Sacred Liturgy, Vatican Council II

<sup>4</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 315, para. 1113) Print.

<sup>5</sup> Lumen Gentium, I

<sup>6</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 426, para. 1534) Print.

- ◆ Sacraments use signs and symbols drawn from creation, human life and the history of salvation and become bearers of the sanctifying action of Christ.

## SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

***“Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.”***<sup>7</sup>

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.<sup>8</sup>

1. The sacrament of Baptism is the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation. These Sacraments - Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist - lay the foundation of every Christian life. “The sharing in the divine nature given to man through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin - birth / Baptism, development - strengthening / Confirmation, and nourishing - food / Eucharist, of natural life.” By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, the faithful thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance towards perfection of charity.<sup>9</sup>
2. By means of the Sacraments of Christian initiation, the faithful receive the unique graces that come with being in unity with God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Sacraments of Initiation fully incorporate one into the Body of Christ, the Church.
3. Through the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism, we are freed from the effects of Original sin, which was inherited by the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and we are reborn as children of God through water and the spirit.
4. Baptism is birth into the new life of Christ. In accordance with the Lord’s will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.<sup>10</sup>
5. All of the four Gospels write of John the Baptizer, chosen by the Spirit as a messenger of God, to announce the fulfillment of time for the appearance of the long awaited promised Messiah. When asked if he were the expected Messiah, John replied “*“I am not the Messiah.”*. . . *“I am ‘the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’”*<sup>11</sup> *“I am baptizing you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*<sup>12</sup>
6. When Jesus came to where John was baptizing in the River Jordan, John was reluctant to baptize Jesus saying, “I need to be baptized by you and yet you are coming to me.” And Jesus said, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill

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<sup>7</sup> Jn. 3:5-6

<sup>8</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 342, para. 1213) Print.

<sup>9</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 341, para. 1212) Print; Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Divinae consortium naturae*

<sup>10</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 357, para. 1277) Print.

<sup>11</sup> John, 1:20, 22-23

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 3:11

all righteousness”<sup>13</sup>

7. Jesus submitted Himself to the baptism of John. His immersion in the water is a sign for all of us of the need to die to oneself to do God’s will. Jesus did not need to be baptized because He was totally faithful to the will of His Father and free from all sin; however he wanted to show His solidarity with us in order to reconcile us to the Father.
8. In His dialogue with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, Jesus expressed baptism to be necessary for salvation. “*No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit . . . You must be born from above.*”<sup>14</sup> Baptism seals the person’s soul with a **permanent spiritual mark** or character identifying one as belonging to Christ; because of this character, baptism cannot be repeated.
9. After His Resurrection, and just prior to His Ascension back to the Father, Jesus commissioned 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.*”<sup>15</sup> This command is perhaps the clearest expression in the New Testament of the Trinity. It also expresses that Baptism brings us into union with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By commanding His disciples to baptize all nations, He established the means by which people would die to sin – Original and actual – and begin to live a new life with God.
10. The Sacrament of Baptism within the Catholic Church can be conferred upon anyone who accepts the teachings of the Church, desires to conform themselves into the fullness of the Christian life, become disciples of Jesus and become members of the faith community of the Church. Persons baptized in another Christian church can be welcomed into the Catholic Church through a Profession of Faith, openly declaring belief in the teachings of the Catholic Church after due process of instruction. Such individuals need not be baptized into the Church, provided their baptism in that other Christian church was duly administered in the manner and intent of the Sacrament, namely, through immersion or pouring of water with recitation of the formula of baptizing, “*In the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.*” If there is doubt of validity of such prior baptism, the Sacrament will be bestowed a second time conditionally.
11. The Catholic Church recommends and urges that infants be baptized in order that they too may be welcomed into the community of the Church and receive the benefits of the Sacrament - remission of original sin, and have access to the fullness of the means of salvation, provided however that there is moral certitude that the child will be raised as a member of the Catholic faith through the intent of the parents or godparents. It will be the responsibility of the parents or/and godparents to teach, encourage and support the child in the faith and how to live as practicing Catholic.

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<sup>13</sup> Matt. 3:14-15; Fulfill all righteousness - the fulfillment of prophesy of conduct in conformity with God’s will; to submit to the plan of God for the salvation of humanity.

<sup>14</sup> John 3:5-7

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 28:19

12. The practice of infant baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church. There is explicit testimony to this practice from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century on, and it is quite possible that, from the beginning of apostolic preaching, when whole households received Baptism, infants were also baptized.<sup>16</sup> Children, born and unborn, who die without Baptism, the Church entrusts them to the mercy of God, who wills that all people be saved.<sup>17</sup>
13. However, the Church also teaches that the baptism of an infant may be postponed if there is not a founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup>
14. Candidates for Baptism who die before they receive the Sacrament but have repented their sins and have embraced Christ's love, are saved by what is called Baptism of Desire. Similarly, anyone who has never had the Gospel presented to them, who do not know of Jesus or the Church, yet seek the truth and try to do God's will, and would have desired baptism if they had known its necessity would be considered as having Baptism of Desire.<sup>19</sup>
15. The Church further holds that those who suffer and die for the faith in Christ before they could be baptized are saved by Baptism of Blood and will be considered as martyrs for the faith.<sup>20</sup>
16. The ordinary ministers of Baptism are Bishops, Priests or Deacons. However, in the event of necessity, anyone with proper and required intention, even a non-baptized person, may baptize by use of water and the formula of the Trinity.<sup>21</sup>
17. Jesus preached holiness of life to everyone without exemption. Through Baptism we are cleansed of all sin and made partakers in the divine nature, and are truly sanctified. The Holy Spirit moves us to answer that call to holiness. In Baptism we are asked to walk by the Light of Christ with deeper love. Our goal now is to hold onto the gracious act of sanctification that we have received from Christ. St. Paul lays down a practical plan for holiness:

*Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another . . . as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And above all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.*<sup>22</sup>

18. God gave us free will. While He gives us Baptism and the other Sacraments to

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<sup>16</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 351, para. 1252) Print; Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Cor. 1:16

<sup>17</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 353, para. 1261) Print.

<sup>18</sup> Code of Canon Law, 868, Para. 2

<sup>19</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 352, para. 1259) Print.

<sup>20</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 352, para. 1258) Print.

<sup>21</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 352, para. 1256) Print; 1 Tim. 2:4

<sup>22</sup> Col. 3:12-13

help us make correct choices, these Sacraments do not force us to do good and avoid sin. However, grace is received by which, through our cooperation with these graces, we can more easily overcome the urgings or inclination of commission of sin. “Certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death and such frailties inherent in life as weakness of character . . . as well as an inclination to sin.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Key Points**

- ◆ Baptism gives a person birth into new life. It is necessary for salvation and for entry into the Church.
- ◆ Effects of Baptism are delivery from all sin, Original and personal, the reception of the grace of divine adoption, being made a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit, initiated into the Church, and being made a sharer in Christ’s mission.
- ◆ Baptism seals the person’s soul with a permanent spiritual mark identifying one as belonging to Christ

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<sup>23</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 353, para. 1264) Print.