

# A REASON FOR HOPE

**A Catholic Faith Study for Inmates**

**PART ONE**  
The Sacraments

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*A Catholic Faith Study for Inmates*

## PART ONE The Sacraments

*“Always be ready  
to give an explanation  
to anyone who asks  
you for a reason  
for your hope.”*

1 Peter 3:15

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# **A Reason for Hope**

## Faith Study Instructions

### The Sacraments

#### **Part One of the Faith Study contains:**

- 1) *Introduction* to the Sacraments
- 2) *Study Sections* on the Sacraments
- 3) *Review Test* pages

#### **Begin the Study:**

- 1) Read *Introduction to the Sacraments*.  
Do the *Review Test* page at the end of the study booklet.
  
- 2) Read all *seven sections* on the sacraments.  
Do the *Review Test* pages at the end of the study booklet.

#### **Completing Part One:**

- Tear out carefully only the pages called *Review Test* at the end of the study booklet after you have completed them.
- Review and correct these pages with your study coordinator.
- Receive a certificate of completion for the section of the Bible study you have completed.

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# Introduction

## Understanding the Sacraments

### Signs of God's presence

The Old Testament is full of stories about the ways that God was present to his people. When Abraham welcomed three travelers and offered them food he was visited by God's messengers who told him he would have a son (*Genesis 18*). When Moses was in the desert God spoke to him through a bush that was on fire but did not burn up:

*"...God called out to him from the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' He answered, 'Here I am.' God said 'Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground' "* (*Exodus 3: 4-5*).

When the prophet Elijah was hiding in a cave and afraid for his life God revealed himself in *"a tiny whispering sound"* (*1 Kings 19:12*). When God spoke to Job he used more than a quiet whisper: *"Then the LORD addressed Job out of the storm..."* (*Job 38:1*).

By means of simple creatures, *a bush, fire, a whispering wind or a storm*, God made his presence known to human beings. He did this because he is the Creator of all things—rocks, plants, insects, animals and human beings. In God's way of doing things, creatures can serve as powerful signs of God's presence.

Just as there are many ways that God can be present to his people there also are many ways that people celebrate God's presence among them. Beginning with Abraham, and especially Moses, God inspired his people to use sacred rituals. The books of the Old Testament are filled with instructions on how the Israelites were taught to worship God. When the people worshipped in the right spirit and with good lives they remembered what God had done for them and their faith in God was stronger. But when they went through the rituals with empty hearts and sinful lives God rejected their worship: *"The Lord has disowned his altar..."* (*Lamentations 2:7*). The Bible teaches that in order to truly worship God we must have a heart that is both faithful to him and mindful of the needs of others.

### The signs of Jesus

Jesus also used created things as signs that God was present and helping his people. He used his own *hands* to hold, touch and bless people. He cured *"...sick people by laying his hands them"* (*Mark 6:5*). At other times he used only his *voice* to cast out demons (*Matthew 8:32*), calm the sea (*Matthew 8:26*), or raise people from the dead (*John 11:43*). He even used his *clothing* as a way to share his power to heal (*Luke 8:45*). He used *natural things* like wet clay on the eyes of a blind man (*John 9:6*) or water and wine at Cana (*John 2:11*). He did not have to do this to heal or bring people back to life. He could have just willed it in his mind to make it happen. That is exactly what he did when he healed the centurion's servant (*Luke 7:7*). The boy was healed even before the centurion reached home. Most of the time, however, Jesus chose to use created things—like *bread*—to reveal the power of God:

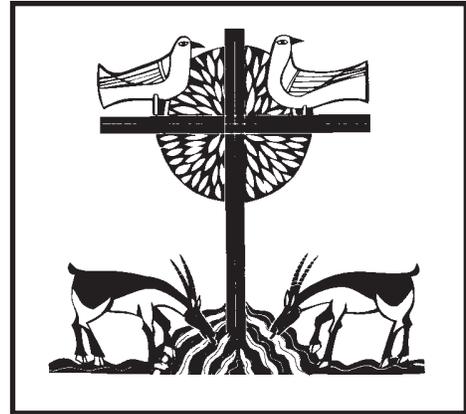
*"In those days when there again was a great crowd without anything to eat, he summoned the disciples and said, 'My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will collapse on the way,*



*and some of them have come a great distance.’ His disciples answered him, ‘Where can anyone get enough bread to satisfy them here in this deserted place?’ Still he asked them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ ‘Seven,’ they replied. He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then taking the seven loaves he gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them to the crowd” (Mark 8:1-6).*

Notice that Jesus did not give the loaves of bread to the people himself. He handed them to his disciples to give out. We learn something very important from what Jesus did. In a way, it was like a hint of things to come. This story helps us understand that after Christ died and rose from the dead, his *apostles* (and those who took their place after them) fed the followers of Christ who gathered in his name with the “bread” of the sacraments. To this very day the Church continues to carry out the ministry that began with Christ’s love for people.

This love that flows from Christ’s heart is like a never ending stream. After his earthly ministry this stream of love continued to flow to the early church and then to every generation of believers that followed. As the apostle Paul said: “*For as Christ’s sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow*” (2 Corinthians 1:5). The things that Christ said and did end on the cross or in the grave. The risen Christ is still living and acting among us. He continues to speak and act through the *sacraments* which nourish and strengthen his followers in every age. Christ’s followers are watered and fed by the overflowing stream of his *sacraments*.



## **Sacred times and signs**

In a way all life is a mystery. Even in our ordinary lives we have times that are so important that we have special rituals and ceremonies for them: *we are born into a family, grow from a child to an adult, share food together, fail and ask to be forgiven, cope with sickness and death, marry and create a family, and dedicate ourselves in service to others.* Because God is present in every moment of our lives the Church recognizes that Christ left us *seven sacred actions* that match these important times in our lives.

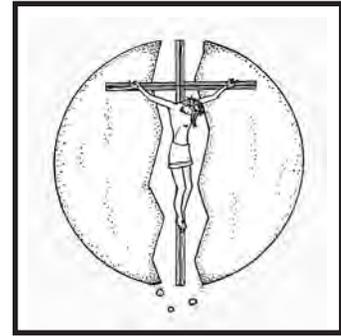
Because a sacrament is called a *sign* it is important to understand this word. It comes from the Latin word *signum* which has many meanings. A *marker* along the road is a sign. It tells us if we are going in the right direction or how far we have to go. A *flag* or *banner* that soldiers carry in battle is a sign that represents their country. At the start of a race or game, someone blows a horn or shoots a gun as a *signal* to begin. We must give a *gesture* or *password* before we are allowed to enter a group or club. Sometimes a sign lets us know what is coming, like the thunder we hear even before a storm hits. Each of these meanings can be used to help us understand why the sacraments are called *signs*. They are signs of God’s action in our lives—purifying, forgiving, strengthening, nourishing, healing and uniting us. They are called signs because they both *point to* and *give us God’s grace*.

## **The sacraments and the Church**

The Church believes that each of the sacraments has its beginning in and flows from everything Jesus said and did. His love and care are carried over into the sacraments and they continue his presence and ministry to this very day. In the same way that the Church decided which books belonged in the Bible, and faithfully preserved the teaching of the apostles, it also has preserved and named the seven special signs of his ministry that Christ gave to his Church.

Because it is faithful to the will of Christ, the Church is called to repeat his words and actions in each sacrament. Like God in the Old Testament and Jesus during his earthly ministry, the Church also uses created things to share God’s power in the sacraments: *water, oil, bread, wine, words and hands*. The

Church is a *living memory* because it never stops remembering what Jesus said and did. This kind of remembering goes beyond the usual meaning of this word. For the Church, like ancient Israel, *remembering* brings the past and present into one sacred moment. In that moment we relive what God has done for us: “*Come and see the works of God, awesome in the deeds done for us*” (Psalm 66:5). Through the words and actions of the sacraments we believe God is present and working among us here and now. We celebrate and receive God’s grace.



“...do this in memory of me”  
(Luke 22:19).

The sacraments are not magic. Because it is the power of Christ and his Spirit that works through the sacraments, they must be done as the Church intends. This is explained by the saying: *ex opere operato*. This means: *by the very fact that it is done*. In other words, the sacrament does not *work* because of any goodness of the person who performs it or receives it. It is the power of God at work. Nevertheless, those who perform them and those who receive them should prepare their hearts and souls carefully so that they gain all that Christ desires to give them through his sacraments. In every sacrament we meet Christ himself. It is Christ who reaches out to us, saves us and gives us a wonderful gift – *grace* – which is a share in the life of God. When someone asks: “*What do the sacraments do for us?*” we can answer: “*They give us grace*” as much as we are prepared to receive.

## Understanding grace

The word *grace* comes from the Latin *gratia* which means *gift*. This is how Paul uses it in this passage from *Ephesians 2:8*: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from you; it is the gift of God;...*” When Paul says we have been *saved* he means we have been saved from *sin* – our own sins and the original sin that we shared with the entire human race since the beginning when the first sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. If grace is God’s answer to sin, in order to understand grace we must understand what sin is.

*Genesis* tells the story of how the first man and woman chose their own way over God’s way. What they did started a chain reaction that has touched the lives of every human being that has ever lived or will live. However, God did not create people to be sinful and unhappy. God created us so that we would come to know, love and serve him in this life, and be happy with him forever. In order to love, God gave us a *will* so that we could be *free to love*. Unless this will is free there is no possible way to love. However, this gift of a free will has a built-in risk. It also allows us to choose between good and evil. If we choose what is evil we must accept the consequences. If we hit a ball against a wall it will bounce back. If we do something wrong things will happen to us and to others. We sin by our own choice and bring terrible suffering upon ourselves and others, even those we love. As the common saying goes, even the families of inmates endure a sentence of their own as they cope with a loved one behind bars. As Paul put it so well: “*Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body?*” (*Romans 7:24*).

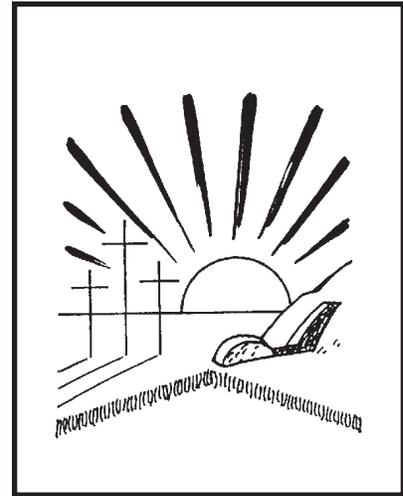
The gospel, however, offers us a way out of our human suffering. It brings us the hope of a new beginning despite the mess we have made of our lives. We did not deserve this, but God in his goodness saves us from ourselves. Not only that, God then invites us to live as his friends. If we accept God’s friendship it is so deep within us that as Christ says, “*We will come to him and make our dwelling with him*” (*John 14:23*). As St. Augustine used to say: “*God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.*” This is called the *indwelling* of God’s life and love in us. It begins to grow now and continues into eternity. This wonderful gift is called *grace* and, as Christ’s gospel announces, it means life with God that has no end: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life*” (*John 6:47*).

## Eternal life

Abraham called God “*the Eternal*” (*Genesis 21:33*). God has no beginning and no end. God is the only one who was living before everything was created. Therefore, our lives are not our own making. They

are a gift from God. As followers of Christ we believe that even when our bodies die, our souls live forever: “...*whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*” (John 11:25-26).

Eternal life is not something that happens to us only after we are dead, however. While we are on earth we can begin this never-ending life by accepting the message of Jesus, becoming a member of his body through baptism and allowing him to change the way we live: “*Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ*” (John 17:3). Notice the gospel says is: “*this is eternal life*” (v.3). In *1 John 5:12* we read: “*Whoever possesses the Son has life;...*” Also, eternal life means living with the same kind of love that Christ had for others: “*...whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen*” (*1 John 4:20*). This life of love frees us from the slavery of selfishness. With the help of the sacraments it continues to grow in us until we reach our heavenly home where we will live with God forever. In that sense each sacrament is also a pledge of future glory: “*I give them eternal life and they shall never perish*” (John 10:28).



## **The seven sacraments**

Each sacrament has a *three-fold purpose* to help us live as Christ’s faithful followers:

- 1) *grow in holiness like God,*
- 2) *build up the people of God,*
- 3) *give worship to God.*

While each of the sacraments has this three-fold purpose, only three of them (*baptism, confirmation and holy orders*) place a special “*seal*” on those who receive them which means they belong to Christ forever. That is why they can never be repeated. Our common understanding of the word *seal* helps us understand what this means. Legal papers often have seals on them to prove they are trustworthy. Seals are placed on packages so that no one opens them except the receiver. Ranchers put a brand on their animals to claim them as their own. In ancient times, slaves and soldiers received a brand or tattoo on their bodies to show that they belonged to someone else. We read in the Bible that, after Cain killed his brother, he told God that his punishment was too much to bear, “*So the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest anyone should kill him at sight*” (*Genesis 4:15*).

Although they will be covered in more detail in the rest of this book, the following is a brief description of each the sacraments:

### **Baptism:**

*Through water and the Spirit we are born again into God’s family. We are cleansed of sin, and we promise to reject Satan and follow Christ. Baptism is a one of three sacraments that is never repeated.*

### **Confirmation:**

*We are given power by the Holy Spirit to help us pray, love God’s word, serve others and witness to Christ and his gospel in the world. Confirmation is a one of three sacraments that is never repeated.*

### **Eucharist:**

*We receive the true body and blood of Christ when the bread and wine we offer are changed into Christ’s body and blood in memory of him. This real presence of Christ in the Mass and in our Church tabernacles unites us to him, each other and all God’s people.*

## **Reconciliation:**

*The sins we commit after Baptism are forgiven, as Jesus promised. This forgiveness depends on a contrite heart, a spirit of repentance, humble confession of our sins, and making up for what we did wrong.*

## **Anointing of the Sick:**

*When we are sick we are anointed with oil, our sins are forgiven and our bodies are entrusted to God's care. We receive comfort and strength as we face sickness or even death.*

## **Marriage:**

*We pledge faithful love to our spouse and share in God's power to create new human beings. As Jesus taught, this bond should last a lifetime.*

## **Holy Orders:**

*As members of the Church we are given spiritual leaders to bring us closer to God and his grace. As bishops, priests and deacons they serve the Church as shepherds and teachers, continuing the ministry of Christ and his apostles. Holy Orders is a one of three sacraments that is never repeated.*

## **Jesus as the sacrament**

We have seen how God chose ordinary things in creation to serve as signs of himself. There was another more perfect way that God revealed himself to human beings. It was by becoming one of us. Two thousand years ago God became a human being, in order to live with us, teach us, then die and rise from the dead. Because God was living and acting in Jesus, to meet Jesus was to meet God. Jesus explained this to Philip when he asked Jesus to show the Father to him and the other apostles: “ *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father* ” (John 14:9).



Jesus taught us how to live with love in the same way that God lives with love. Jesus did not teach us with words alone, however. He taught by his example. That is why we also can understand Jesus as a *sacrament*. Because of his words and actions Jesus is a powerful *sign* of God's presence and love:

*“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that are not written in this book./ But these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31).*

When Peter stood up to speak to the crowd at Pentecost, he also described the powerful example that Jesus gave to all people: “*Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know*” (Acts 2:22). Everything Jesus said and did made him both a *sign* of hope and a *source* of God's grace. Jesus continues to be a sacrament today for all those who believe in him and follow the example of his life. “*No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him*” (John 1:18). To know him is to have access to God and eternal life.

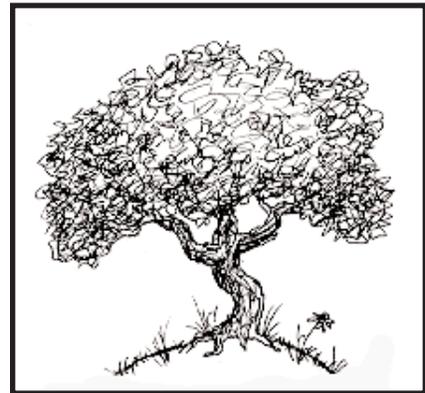
## **The Church as sacrament**

Because Christ continues to act in and through his Church and its sacraments, the Church (which is both lay people and clergy) also can be regarded as a *sign* of God's love and care—in other words, a *sacrament*.

The Church announces the gospel and invites all human beings to share in the knowledge of God's goodness and mercy. The Church also feeds and strengthens the Christian community itself so that as it follows Christ it is a believable sign of the gospel. Like Jesus, who cared for sinners and the sick, the Church seeks to put the gospel into action by serving others, especially the poor. It worships God the Father in the Holy Spirit through Christ in his perfect prayer of the Eucharist as well as the other sacraments. In all of these ways, the Church and its members are invited to become more and more like Christ. We begin to live in such a way that as the Church we become a sign of Christ so that others see Christ in us. Although the Church is meant to be a sign of Christ and to continue his work, it does not mean, that individual members of the Church, whether lay people or clergy, are perfect and do not sin or cause scandal. Some Christians are wealthy and forgetful of the poor, sick and starving. In the past, some popes lived immoral lives, focused on gaining worldly power and fought wars to get it. In our day, some clergy sexually abused young people who were supposed to be in their spiritual care. This caused great scandal inside and outside the Church, hurt the victims and their families and cost the Church millions of dollars. Yet this must be viewed in the light of the Church that also continues to educate and care for millions of people throughout the world through its schools, clinics, hospitals and food programs. It works for justice and the rights of people, opposing abortion, torture, war and the death penalty.

## To understand means to *stand under*

If we stand under a great tree and look up at it, our eyes can follow up the trunk into its many branches. We can see how the branches spread out in every direction with the sun shining through the colorful leaves. It is an excellent way to see the tree as it is. To stand under something is also a great way to understand it. It means we are willing to humble ourselves and open our minds to appreciate it for what it is.



With this study of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, we will try to understand what they are about. We will try to *get under them* by being humble, keeping our minds open and allowing our hearts to accept the truth. In this way we will learn more about their roots, how they came to be, and learn to appreciate their beauty and goodness.

If we want to learn to play a card game, we have to do a “run through” - a quick game that gives us an idea of how to play the game. After we have done that we start to play the real game. Reading about the rules of the game is not the same as actually trying it. In this study we will not only read about the sacraments. We will try to get inside each sacrament to see how they are done. At the end of each chapter there is an example of how the Church celebrates the sacrament. This also will help us understand each sacrament better, even if we never have the chance to see them for ourselves.

To help us in this study of the sacraments we will turn to both *scripture* (the Bible) and *tradition* (the teaching handed on by the apostles to the Church). The Bible helps us understand the sacraments through the words and actions of Christ. The Church shares what has been handed down to us from the apostles ever since the first Christians began to gather and celebrate their life together in Christ. Two thousand years of tradition have not muddied the waters that flow from Christ through his apostles to his Church. The sacraments that we have today are faithful to what Christ intended. The Church has been a faithful keeper of the sacraments which are the special ways Christ carries out his ministry to this day. He does this through the words and actions of his followers every time they gather to celebrate his presence in their midst. There is an ancient saying in the Church, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. This means that we can learn what *the Church believes by how it prays*. Not only do the words and actions of the sacraments show how we pray, they show what we believe. If anyone wishes to understand the Church they should see the sacraments in action.

# The Sacrament of Baptism

“ *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...* ” (Mark 16:16).

## Understanding the Bible and Baptism

### Water in the Bible

Water is an important symbol throughout the Bible. Water is part of the creation story: “...*a mighty wind swept over the waters*” (Genesis 1:2). Later, in the story of the great flood, we read: “*As the waters increased, they lifted the ark, so that it rose above the earth*” (Genesis 7:17). Only Noah and all those with him “...*were saved through water*” (1 Peter 3:20).

When Moses led the Israelites out of slavery the waters of the Red Sea parted and they escaped to freedom: “*When the water was thus divided, the Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land, with the water like a wall to their right and to their left*” (Exodus 14:21-22).

After being tested in the desert, Joshua and the people crossed over to the promised land while the Jordan River stopped flowing: “*While all Israel crossed over on dry ground, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD remained motionless on dry ground in the bed of the Jordan until the whole nation had completed the passage*” (Joshua 3:17).

The prophets also used water to bring the people back to God, from the sins and idols that had made their lives unclean. With cleansing came forgiveness: “*I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you*” (Ezekiel 36:25).

In the New Testament, after hearing John the Baptist many people “...*were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins*” (Matthew 3:6). John also baptized Jesus before he began his own ministry. Jesus did not need to be baptized but what he did that day foretold his death and resurrection. His baptism in the river revealed who he was: “*On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him*” (Mark 1:10). Jesus was God’s *beloved* and he stood beside sinners even though he himself was innocent of sin.

During his ministry Jesus used water as a sign of the eternal life he was offering each person: “ ‘...*the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*’ ” (John 4:14). In order to share in that life and enter the doorway of God’s kingdom we must be washed clean and reborn:

“ *Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit...* ” (John 3:5).

After his resurrection Jesus instructed his disciples to use the waters of baptism to make new 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,...*” (Matthew 28:19).

The word “baptize” in Greek has several meanings. It means to *dip or lower something into the water* like a jar in order to fill it. The same word also describes how *cloth is dipped in dye* to change its color, or how a *boat sinks under the water*. It also means to *take a bath*. This helps us understand what happens when we are baptized. It changes us spiritually. We become a new person who lives and behaves differently as a follower of Christ:

“*So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ...*” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).



## Washed Clean

Through baptism we are washed clean of all our sins, the ones we personally committed and the *original sin* we inherited because we are human beings. We might say that the first sin of Adam and Eve polluted all human life, like toxic waste at the beginning of a stream that has flowed down to us. From them we inherited a rebel's heart and the false idea that we can make our own rules or put our own happiness before the happiness of everyone else. If it is left unchecked human selfishness can rise like a dangerous flood. But just as Noah was saved by the ark, we are rescued from drowning in our own sins by baptism:



*“...God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water. This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 3:20-21).*

With baptism our selfishness is washed away in God's forgiveness. We learn that the center of life is not in ourselves but in God.

## Dying and living with Christ

When we are brought to the waters of baptism we are *buried* with Christ and *rise* to a new life. But how is it that water can stand for both *death* and *life*? The answer lies in the natural power of water itself. For example, we can either *drown in it or drink it*. When a boat sinks under the water its passengers drown. But when people are dying of thirst and find water to drink their lives are saved. Through baptism we leave our old ways and bad habits behind because they dragged us down to an unhappy life. Our new life is not like that. It introduces us to new, life-giving ways that lift us up to God's happiness:

*“We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).*

## Clothed in Christ

When people get ready for something important they put on good clothes or get new ones. In *Genesis*, Jacob told his family: “ ‘Get rid of the foreign gods you have among you; then purify yourselves and put on fresh clothes’ ” (*Genesis* 35:2). When we are baptized it is like changing our clothes. The white garment we receive in baptism means we have put aside our selfish ways and put on Christ's new way of love.

The white garment also means we will share in Christ's heavenly glory. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, an amazing change came over him:

*“...his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them” (Mark 9:3).*

While this was happening Jesus also heard the very same words his Father spoke when he was baptized in the Jordan river: “ ‘This is my beloved Son’ ” (*Mark* 9:7). The white garment reminds us that we are God's *beloved* and that one day we will be with God forever in heaven as we stand “*...before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes...*” (*Revelation* 7:9).

## Living in the light

We walk with the gospel of Christ lighting up the path of our life: “*...God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, ‘We have fellowship with him,’ while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another...*” (*1 John* 1:5-7). Honesty and truth, not pretending or lies, mark the way we deal with others.

Because we have risen with Christ in baptism we can help others find their way back to him. Like the good Samaritan we can bind up the wounds of our fellow travelers or encourage others to stay on the path of the gospel. Our light shines not only in words but in deeds that serve the needs of those around us:

*“For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5:8).*



## Called to be family

We all have asked ourselves: “*Who am I? Where do I belong?*” In baptism, we hear our names spoken by the priest who represents the people of God. We discover that we are a child of God and belong to God’s family. We no longer live alone, but are members of Christ’s body: “*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...*” (I Corinthians 12:13). Whatever happens to one of his members happens to all including Christ. Jesus made this clear when he described the final judgment: “*‘...Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’*” (Matthew 25:40).

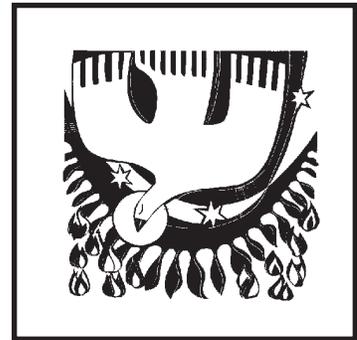
Before Paul was an apostle he hunted down and punished Christians. One day a bright light knocked him to the ground, and a voice said: “*‘...I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’*” (Acts 9:5). Christ meant that his followers are so much a part of him that what is done to them is done to him. For the rest of his life Paul often spoke and wrote about this truth:

*“If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.  
Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” (I Corinthians 12:26-27).*

## Life in the Spirit

Jesus taught that we must be born again in *water and the Spirit* because water is *cleansing* and the Spirit is *power*. At Pentecost as Peter repeated the story of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, he also promised that the Spirit would come upon them if they sought forgiveness for their sins in baptism:

*“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, ‘What are we to do, my brothers?’ Peter [said] to them, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:37-38).*



The truth of the gospel cuts us to the heart so that we can be cleansed of our wrong-doing. This clears the way for the holy Spirit to re-make our lives as God’s children. We begin to live the very life of God:

*“But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not of natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God” (John 1:12).*

Yet because we are human our own power is limited. After we are baptized life still can be hard and our faith tested. We may feel strong one day and weak the next, but the Spirit helps us “*stand up for Christ in the storms of life*” as one inmate said. With the Spirit guiding us we can leave our former life behind. Love, light, joy and peace begin to replace the unhappy way we used to live. Jesus our brother is the model of what it means to be a child of God. We need the Spirit to guide us as the Spirit guided him: “*‘...I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me’*” (John 8:28).

# Understanding the Church and Baptism

(Read more about the sacrament of baptism in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1213-1284)

## Christian Initiation

Becoming a Christian is a spiritual journey. We were lost in darkness but are saved by God's light. We were dead but have come to life. On this journey we share in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. There are three sacraments that make this happen: *Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist*. *Baptism* washes away our sins and makes us children of God, *Confirmation* makes us strong in the Spirit so that we become living examples of Christ, and the *Eucharist* – the body and blood of Christ – feeds and unites us at the table of God's family. In this chapter we will study the first sacrament of initiation: *Baptism*. In the chapters after this one we will study the other sacraments of initiation: *Confirmation* and *Eucharist*.

## Preparing for Baptism

Because the Church hands on the faith of the apostles to all those who join God's family, Baptism is a family celebration. This means that it is the responsibility of everyone in this family of the Church to help those who will be baptized prepare for it. Not only the priests, deacons or lay teachers (catechists), but also the parents, godparents, family members, friends, neighbors and members of the Church should show their love and support during the actual ceremony.

## Godparents

Since the early days of the Church those who will be baptized must have godparents. They can have either a godmother or godfather, or both, but the godparents themselves must be baptized, confirmed and have received the Eucharist. It also is important that the godparent is an example of a good Christian. Godparents represent the larger Christian community, and they help with the preparation for baptism, testify to the candidate's sincerity, and continue to support them in living the faith afterward.

## The minister of baptism

The usual or "ordinary" ministers of baptism are a bishop, a priest or a deacon. In the case of emergency, such as death, when no minister is available, any person may baptize (even a non-Christian). That person just needs to have the right intention. Every Christian belongs to the priestly people of God and should know how to baptize. The proper words used for baptizing are: "*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*" Those who are baptized either have their whole bodies immersed in water three times, or they have water poured over their heads three times as the words of baptism are spoken.



## Who is baptized

Both adults and infants may be baptized. Since the days of the apostles entire households, including children, joined the family of faith through baptism (Read *Acts* 16:14-15). Adults hear the call to convert and live by the gospel of Christ, while infants are presented for baptism and brought up in the faith by their Christian family. A record of the baptism is carefully written in the parish books. Once a person is baptized there is no need for them to be baptized again.

The Church also teaches that people also can be saved without being baptized in the usual way: 1) if they died for the faith but were not baptized at the time, 2) if they were preparing for bap-

tism (see *catechumen*\* below) but died beforehand, and 3) if they sought God and tried to do God's will but did not know about Christ or his Church. Finally, regarding infants who die before being baptized, the Church teaches us to have hope in the mercy of God.

## **The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)**

This initiation of Christians prepares adults who have heard the gospel and freely ask to enter the Christian community and its way of life. In order to receive the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist they enter a period of preparation called the *catechumenate* (from a Greek word that means *to teach by word of mouth*). There are three steps involved in this preparation:

### **First Step**

Actually conversion is a life-long process, but this step begins when the person first decides to convert and expresses the desire to become a Christian. The Church accepts the person as a *catechumen*\* (a Greek word that means "*taught by word of mouth*"). During this time of waiting to join the people of God, the person will study and take to heart the teachings of the Church and the Christian life of faith, worship and charity.

### **Second Step**

The second step is called election or enrollment. The Church accepts the person's pledge of faith, inviting them to write his or her name in the book of the elect. This book lists all those who are being initiated. Usually this takes place during the First Sunday of Lent. This is an excellent time to go in spirit with Christ into the desert to purify the mind and heart of sin and the influence of evil. The whole Christian Church, but especially the teachers and godparents, accompany the person with their prayers as they gain a deeper knowledge of Christ who is their light and life.

During the Sundays of Lent the person takes part in the *Scrutinies* and *Presentations*. The three *Scrutinies*, which include an exorcism, uncover and heal what is sinful and weak in the person, but also strengthen what is good. The *Presentations* take place after the Scrutinies and present the person with the *Creed* and *Lord's Prayer*. These few ancient words express the deep mysteries of Christian faith and prayer. This second step ends on Holy Saturday when the elect cuts back on activity and spends time in fasting and prayer to prepare for receiving the sacraments of initiation.

### **Third Step**

The third step is the actual celebration of the sacraments of initiation: *Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist*. The best time for this to take place is during the Easter vigil or otherwise on a Sunday so that the joy of Christ's resurrection is recalled. During this celebration the person is baptized and, in place of the usual anointing, is confirmed. This shows how the mission of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit are closely linked. Finally, the newly baptized Christian shares the body and blood of Christ for the first time with the rest of the Christian family.



### *Mystagogy*

The final part of the third step, called *mystagogy* (pronounced *mist-a-go-jee*) lasts from Easter to Pentecost. During this time the newly baptized person deepens and strengthens the understanding and experience of Christian life by meditating on the gospel, sharing the Eucharist, and doing charitable deeds.

# Understanding the Rite of Baptism

*The Church teaches that anyone who has not been baptized is able to be baptized. Usually, a priest or deacon is the one who baptizes but in an emergency anyone, even non-Christians, can baptize. The words and actions of baptism help us learn the deep and beautiful meaning of this sacrament. What follows is a sampling of how the baptism of adults is celebrated by the Church. It usually takes place during Mass.*

## **The candidates are presented**

The Mass starts as usual. After the sermon the priest asks the candidates and the godparents to gather around the baptismal font. He invites them to pray with him that God will give the candidates light and strength to follow Christ and give them new life in the Holy Spirit. After this the *Litany of the Saints* is sung. In this litany a number of saints, as faithful followers of Christ, are called upon to pray for the candidates. Everything the Church does is with the living and those who have died and are with Christ.

## **Prayer over the water**

Then the priest asks God to bless the water which will be used to baptize. He prays to God who gives new life through the waters of baptism and brings one people together in Christ. He asks in the name of Jesus that those called to cleansing and new birth will share in the Church's faith and in eternal life.

## **Profession of faith and renouncing of sin**

Because the result of baptism is freedom from sin, the priest asks the candidates if they reject sin, the attraction of evil, Satan who is the father of sin as well as all his works and empty promises. The candidates answer that they do. Then the priest asks them if they believe in everything contained in the creed.

## **Baptism**

As the candidates step up to the font they are *immersed* in the water three times or the *water is poured over their heads* three times while the priest says their name and baptizes them *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. They are now cleansed by the waters of baptism which *1 Peter 3:21* clearly explains: *"It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,..."*

## **Anointing with oil**

If confirmation does not take place at this point, the new followers of Christ (which means *anointed*) are anointed with *chrism* (oil that has been blessed by the bishop). As the priest does this he says that God who freed them and brought them to new life now anoints them with the chrism. They are now members of Christ who is *a priest, prophet and king* and they now belong to God's people:

*"But you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were 'no people' but now you are God's people; you 'had not received mercy' but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).*

## **Clothing with the Garment and Giving of the Candle**

The newly baptized are given a white garment and told to clothe themselves in Christ as a new creation. They should return with it unstained when they are judged before Christ: *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27)*. They also receive a candle lit from the Easter candle and told to walk as children of light and keep the flame of faith alive in their hearts. *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light,..." (Ephesians 5:8)*.

## **Conclusion**

The newly baptized are taken back to their places and the Mass continues.

# The Sacrament of Confirmation

*“...he has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts...” (2Corinthians 1:22).*

## Understanding the Bible and Confirmation

### The Spirit in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word for *spirit* is *ruah* which means the spirit-breath of God. It also can mean *wind*. In *Genesis* the Spirit was present at the beginning of creation: *“...a mighty wind swept over the waters” (Genesis 1:2).*

The Spirit (breath) of God also brought life to the first human being:

*“...the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).*



Throughout the history of the chosen people the Spirit guided the chosen people by raising up prophets who would speak on behalf of God. This special call to proclaim the word of God was explained by the prophet Ezekiel in this way:

*“...then the spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me” (Ezekiel 3:24).*

In this way the breath of God’s Spirit through the words spoken by the prophets kept the people faithful to God. The prophets as God’s messengers spoke of a time when God’s Spirit would come upon the messiah and God’s people:

*“The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:  
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
A spirit of counsel and of strength,  
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD...” (Isaiah 11:2).*

God’s Spirit was a powerful force for spiritual change. It changed the way people lived by touching them (as an inmate once put it) *from the heart outward*:

*“I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts” (Ezekiel 36:26).*

The power of the Spirit could enter the heart of every person making it possible for them to take a fresh new look at their lives, whether they were young or old, woman or man, poor or rich:

*“Then afterward I will pour out  
my spirit upon all mankind.  
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,  
your old men shall dream dreams,  
your young men shall see visions;  
Even upon the servants and the handmaids,  
in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 3:1-2).*

## The Spirit and Christ

The Spirit that was moving over the waters at the beginning of creation was the same Spirit that appeared at the waters of the Jordan river when Jesus was baptized by John: *“On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him”* (Mark 1:10). After this happened the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray. When Jesus began his public ministry he used the prophet Isaiah’s words to describe how the Spirit was with him:

*“ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free... ’ ”* (Luke 4:18).

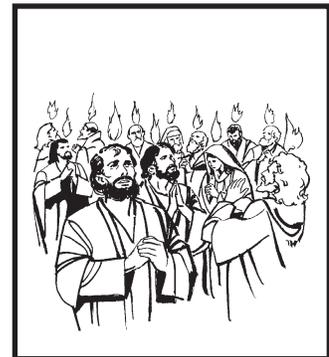
All during his earthly life the Spirit was with Jesus in his preaching and his miracles. Jesus promised to send this same Spirit as an advocate (or helper) after he rose from the dead and returned to his Father:

*“When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me”* (John 15:26).

Finally, on the day the Church calls “Pentecost” the Spirit arrived *“...like a strong driving wind,...”* (Acts 2:2). The apostles *“...were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak...”* (Acts 2:4).

## The power of Pentecost

Through *Confirmation* we are given the same power that the disciples received at Pentecost to witness to the gospel: *“ ‘But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth’ ”* (Acts 1:8). This is the power that Christ promised to his disciples during his ministry: *“ ‘And [behold] I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high’ ”* (Luke 24:49).



This Spirit strengthens us to serve the Church and reach out with a generous heart to a world in need: *“...the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us”* (Romans 5:5).

The Spirit also teaches the followers of Christ to pray: *“In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings”* (Romans 8:26).

During his ministry, Jesus spoke about himself and the Spirit which guided him. In order to prepare his disciples to faithfully proclaim his gospel Jesus promised that they would have help. The Holy Spirit would help them continue this work in his name: *“But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth”* (John 16:13).

From the example of the apostles we learn that the gift of the Holy Spirit, involved the *laying of hands* on people after they were baptized. In the *Acts of the Apostles* Peter and John visit the new Christians of Samaria *“...that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit”* (Acts 8:15-17).

Finally, we have the words of Jesus himself to describe what takes place within us. We are filled to overflowing with God's life:

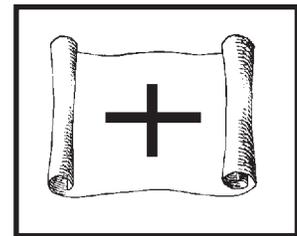
*“ ‘...Rivers of living water will flow from within him’ ” ( John 7:38).*

Paul describes how the *gifts* the Holy Spirit gives each of us are not for our own glory. They are meant to benefit others by building up the Church and serving the needs of all:

*“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).*

## Marked with the seal

Confirmation places God's seal on us, but what does this mean? As Paul told the Corinthians, the one who anointed him and them is God who *“...has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 1:22)*. Understanding just what a seal is will help us understand this sacrament better too. When we buy something that has “the seal of approval” it means that it is the real thing and that it is well made. Our diplomas have a seal that means we did the work and earned a passing grade.



Often the box or room that holds valuables is locked and a seal is placed over the lock. No one can open it without breaking the seal. Whatever is locked inside belongs to the owner who has the key, or the person who has the owner's permission to break the seal and open it: *“ ‘Is this not preserved in my treasury,/ sealed up in my storehouse...?’ ” (Deuteronomy 32:34).*

In the old days, when important letters or packages were to be opened by only one person, they were sealed with hot wax and an official stamp or ring was pressed into the wax. If the letter or package arrived with the seal unbroken the receiver knew it was not opened. The Bible referred to this kind of seal: *“I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who sat on the throne. It had writing on both sides and was sealed with seven seals” (Revelation 5:1).*

Rulers or government officials also used a seal to give their approval to someone who represented them. In *Genesis*, we read that after Joseph was sold into Egypt he became so trusted by the ruler that he was allowed to wear his official ring: *“ ‘Herewith,’ Pharaoh told Joseph, ‘I place you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ With that, Pharaoh took off his signet ring and put it on Joseph's finger” (Genesis 41:41-42).*

The *Song of Songs* used this idea to speak of the love between two people whose hearts belong to no one else but each other: *“Set me as a seal on your heart...” (Song of Songs 8:6).*

The seal of Confirmation reminds us that we belong totally to God. Because God now “owns” us this seal officially empowers us to represent Christ in a world that needs spiritual healing. We can help make things more just and peaceful by living the gospel and sharing it with others. The holy Spirit given in Confirmation will help us do this even when it is difficult.

# Understanding the Church and Confirmation

(Read more about the sacrament of confirmation in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1285-1321)

Confirmation celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a “confirming” of the gifts given by the Spirit at baptism. Therefore, Confirmation is connected to Baptism as a *sacrament of initiation* because it strengthens what happens at Baptism. To *confirm* means to *strengthen*. The sacrament of Confirmation follows Baptism, either right away after an adult is baptized, or if an infant is baptized, it takes place later on in life after the child has grown up.

## Who can confirm?

Ordinarily the bishop confirms, but the bishop can give special permission to perform this sacrament to a priest for serious reasons. Priests who baptize a person may also have permission to confirm them, taking care to use the special oil (*chrism*) that has been blessed by the bishop.

## Who can be confirmed?

Every person who has been baptized should receive the benefits of this sacrament. If possible, the sick person who is in danger of death should receive this sacrament. Sometimes babies are confirmed after being baptized, but usually confirmation is given to those who have reached the *age of reason*. This means they are able to understand right from wrong, make decisions and be responsible for them.

## Oil

The oil (or *chrism*) that is used has been blessed by the bishop, usually during a special Mass on Holy Thursday or during Holy Week. Using the oil blessed by him symbolizes unity with the bishop who is the successor of the apostles. The use of oil is a sign that is full of meaning. In ordinary life it is used as medicine to clean and heal wounds, to protect the skin against wind and sun, and to soothe sore muscles.

From the very beginning the Church has used oil as a way of showing that the confirmed are anointed with the Holy Spirit. Because *Christ* means *anointed* we can say they are *Christed*. Anointing *seals* them, marking them for service in Christ’s own mission to serve the will of his Father and the salvation of humanity, just as Christ was marked with his Father’s seal: “ ‘For on him the Father, God, has set his seal’ ” (John 6:27).



## Preparing for Confirmation

Those who intend to receive Confirmation should prepare themselves carefully. They should be in a state of grace (the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an excellent way to be cleansed spiritually). They also should study how they belong to the Church, what the duties of a Christian are, and how they share in the mission of Christ.

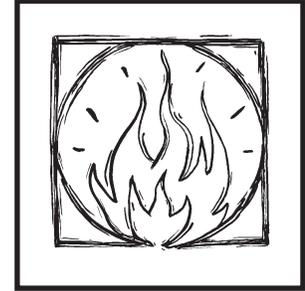
## Members of the Church

Confirmation strengthens us as family members of Christ’s Church. Keeping a feeling of belonging to the Church when inmates are isolated from it is a challenge. However, the Church is not only on the outside of prison walls, it is also on the inside where inmates live. Inmates can find others for prayer and Bible reading, They also can bring the gospel to their fellow inmates as they find ways to help them. The chance to witness is always as close as the person next to us. We also can witness to the gospel by the way we live instead of preaching. This is not always easy, but *courage* is a gift of the

Spirit.

## Put to the test

As *confirmed* followers of Christ we are called to be loyal to his gospel. This means we must be ready to take a stand for good not evil, for unselfishness not selfishness. At times it will seem like our loyalty is being tested by fire “ ‘...I will test them as gold is tested’ ” (Zechariah 13:9). Sometimes it is easy to do the right thing. At other times it is a struggle, especially when others do not support us, mock us, or even oppose us. At such times we must bear our “...share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God” (2 Timothy 1:8). We must rely on the strength that comes from the holy Spirit to remain true to our values as Christians.



Being a Christian in today's world is not easy. We might not become martyrs like the early Christians, but we may face many tests and trials that are part of daily living. This takes a lot of wisdom and courage but the Spirit can give us the power to do it. We must face not only our own failures and weaknesses but those of others too. When we react violently to someone's insult, we have to ask: “*who has the power?*” Actually, our violent reaction gives the other person power, while the consequences fall on us. For example, “saving face” often gets one of the people involved locked up behind bars. When we are tested by someone else, it is an opportunity to have true personal power. This may go against what we learned in the streets but the power of the Spirit can help us be true to ourselves. Through it all it is important to remember who we are: “*There never has been nor will there ever be another you.*” So we must believe in ourselves, respect ourselves, and learn to be really powerful in a spiritual way because our lives are a gift from God.

## The power of the Spirit

This day-to-day test of our promise to follow Christ takes place outside of us in the problems we face. It also takes place inside of us. We struggle with only taking care of ourselves, or, being mindful of the needs of others. We also struggle against our bad habits, our addictions, our desire to get ahead or enjoy pleasure at the expense of others. Whether from within or without we may feel overwhelmed by this struggle with our spiritual enemies. To keep us from being overcome by these powers we need the strength and courage of the holy Spirit:

*“When you go out to war against your enemies...do not be afraid of them, for the LORD, your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, will be with you.*

*When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and say to the soldiers: ‘Hear, O Israel! Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Be not weakhearted or afraid; be neither alarmed nor frightened by them. For it is the LORD, your God, who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies and give you victory’ ” (Deuteronomy 20:1-4).*

In all of our struggles we must remember how much God values us. Each person is a special creation of God—no one else like us has walked this earth before. We give glory to God by being ourselves and using the gifts he has given us. No one ever praised God by hiding their God-given gifts. Through these gifts we are called to help Christ spread the gospel: “*Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father*” (Matthew 5:16).

No matter where we are, whether free or in prison, every follower of Christ is called to spread the gospel either by words or by example. Most of the time we are called to be faithful in ordinary things. God may not ask us to do great things but he does ask us to do them with great love: “ ‘...whoever gives only a cup of cold water...’ ” (Matthew 10:42) shows God's love in a simple, powerful way.

# Understanding the Rite of Confirmation

*Confirmation usually takes place during the Mass (or Eucharist) so that others of the faith community can also be present. The Mass begins in the usual way, then, after the Liturgy of the Word, the rite of Confirmation takes place. What follows is an example of this rite.*



## **Presentation of the Candidates:**

After the bishop is seated, the candidates are called by name, one by one, to stand before him.

## **Instruction:**

After reflecting on the scriptures which were just proclaimed, the bishop says a few words about the deep, spiritual meaning of the mystery that is going to take place. He reminds them of how Jesus received the Spirit after he was baptized in the river and this Spirit led him into the desert; how the apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; how after that they laid hands on those who had been baptized so that the Holy Spirit might come upon them also. Like the apostles those who are confirmed must be witnesses to Christ and his gospel. They must show the goodness of Christ by the way they live, building up the Church and serving others with the gifts they are given. They must be like Christ who did not come to be served but to serve.

## **Renewal of Baptismal Promises:**

After the bishop's talk, the candidates are asked to renew the faith they, or their godparents in their name, professed at their baptism. They are asked if they *reject Satan* and accept everything that is in the *Creed*. The bishop ends by stating that they must be proud of this faith—it is the faith of the Church in Christ Jesus the Lord.

## **The Laying on of Hands:**

The bishop and the priests who are present extend their hands over the candidates while the bishop prays. He asks the Father who gave them a new birth in baptism, now to pour out the Holy Spirit on these candidates so that they will be strong with his gifts and be more like Christ his Son. The bishop prays again, asking God to send the Holy Spirit to help and guide them with: *wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.*

## **The Anointing with Chrism:**

Then the blessed oil is brought to the bishop. One by one, the candidates come before the bishop and their names are announced to him. He dips his thumb in oil and makes the sign of the cross on their foreheads saying their names and the words, "*Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" This is the central moment of Confirmation. Included with the anointing is the laying on of hands.

## **Intercessions**

Along with the bishop and priest, everyone prays for the newly confirmed, for the godparents, the Church and for all people everywhere, asking that God's love, peace and joy may be with them.

## **Liturgy of the Eucharist, Blessing and Prayer**

Then the Mass continues in the usual way until the end, when a special blessing or prayer is said calling on God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to give the candidates courage to profess the faith, hearts on fire with love, and readiness to live the gospel without being ashamed of the crucified Christ.

# The Sacrament of the Eucharist

“...whoever eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:58)

## Understanding the Bible and the Eucharist

Reading the Old Testament helps us realize that Jesus and the apostles were brought up in the Jewish tradition and were familiar with its prayers and rituals. Several of these found their way into the sacraments and especially the Eucharist.

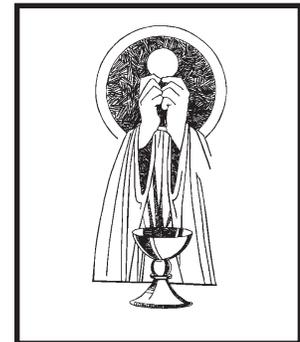
The manna in the desert prepared God’s people to realize that human beings need more than food for the body: *“He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD”* (Deuteronomy 8:3).

In *Exodus* we read that Moses gathered the people together and read the words of God’s covenant to them: *“Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you...’”* (Exodus 24:8). At the last supper Jesus changed the blood of the covenant to his own blood: *“While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many’”* (Mark 14:22-24).

The manna that God sent to feed the people as they wandered in the desert was important to John’s gospel. It is used in the part called “the bread of life discourse” where Jesus used the manna to call himself the bread that the Father was giving to the world: *“...I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst”* (John 6:35).

If his enemies didn’t understand clearly what he was saying Jesus repeated it later in the same discussion: *“Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever”* (John 6:57-58). Jesus could not have explained his presence in the Eucharist more clearly. Yes, it was because of this teaching that *“many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him”* (John 6:66).

The Eucharist gives us the strength to live with great love and generosity because it is no ordinary food. It is the body and blood of Christ who sacrificed himself for us. This food for the journey of life is reflected in the story of Elijah the prophet who fled into the desert to protect himself from those who wanted to kill him. He became so tired and hungry that he fell asleep. Then an angel *“...touched him, and ordered, ‘Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!’ He got up, ate and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb”* (1 Kings 19:7-8). Like many Christians before us who turned to the Eucharist as they faced great trials or hardships in life, we also gain great strength and hope from this spiritual food.



The Eucharist was also the spiritual food that strengthened the faith of the early disciples, enabling them to recover from the death of Jesus and believe in the resurrection: *“This man God raised [on] the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead”* (Acts 10:40-41). In the *breaking of the bread* (as the first Christians called it) they met Christ and received the courage to face whatever trials came their way as followers of the gospel: *“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers”* (Acts 2:42).

## Eating together

Jesus ate with all kinds of people—saints and sinners, rich and poor. He ate in homes and on hillsides. His enemies followed his every move and noticed the people he spent time with: “...*sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’*” (Luke 15:1-2). *Breaking bread* and sharing his message with people was a way of bringing them closer to God if they were open to him. Jesus accepted people no matter who they were or what they had done. Even his enemies would join him for meals, but they kept their minds and hearts closed to the truth he taught.



## A meal to remember

The gospels describe how Jesus served meals that were miracles, feeding thousands of people at one time with only a few loaves and fishes. Yet when he wanted to share the most amazing meal of all he chose a quiet room away from the crowd with a few friends. It was the greatest meal of all time and it was the *last* meal that Jesus would eat before he died. It also was the *first* of many sacred meals that his followers would share until he returned at the end of time. His last meal was the first Eucharist when the bread and wine Jesus shared became his body and blood. He told his followers: “ ‘*This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me*’ ” (Luke 22:19).

## The Passover of Christ

When Jesus gathered with his apostles on the night before he died, it was during the Jewish feast of *Passover*. During the Passover meal the Jews shared several “blessing” cups of wine, ate lamb and unleavened bread. As they ate and drank they recalled their escape from slavery in Egypt by passing unharmed through the Red Sea. God parted the waters while the people walked safely to freedom on the other side. The Passover meal provided the background for what Jesus did. He celebrated the *new passover* which was *his last meal, execution and his passing from death to new life*. Although what Jesus did took place at different parts of the Passover meal, the gospels describe it as one event:



*“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.’ ”* (Matthew 26:26-28)

Jesus himself, the Lamb of God, is the new Passover. He saved all of us from the slavery of sin and death by bringing us to freedom, dignity and life. The death of Jesus and his rising from the grave are God’s unforgettable covenant—God’s promise love us and forgive us.

A few years later the apostle Paul wrote about the unbroken tradition of the Eucharist. His words show how sacred it was for the early Christians:

*“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that...as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes”* (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

In the Catholic faith, the sacrifice of Christ is not repeated. It is the one sacrifice that extends to every time and place throughout all of history. The Eucharist is Christ’s great prayer of praise and thanksgiving for victory over sin and death. Through our baptism we are allowed to share that prayer. Because of that prayer Christ himself becomes present in the consecrated bread and wine.

# Understanding the Church and the Eucharist

(Read more about the sacrament of the Eucharist in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1322-1419).

The words and actions of Jesus are the very center of the Eucharist or Mass to this very day when the priest in the name of Christ (*in persona Christi*) and the name of the Church repeats what Jesus said and did. Catholics believe that Jesus meant what he said. As he handed them the bread and cup, he also gave them his body and blood as a gift that would be sealed by his death on the cross the following day. He did this so that all people in every place and time can share in a covenant with God that will never end.

## Sign and source of love

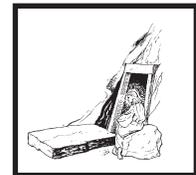
The Eucharist both *stands for* and *helps create* the people of God. It is Christ truly present among his people and it brings his followers together. The Eucharist reminds them of their unity in God's family, and strengthens this basic belief with the "daily bread" of his body and blood. For this reason Christ's followers are a *eucharistic people*. We are made spiritually strong and healthy by this sacred food. As we go out among others as witnesses of the gospel, the living Christ is in us and goes with us.

## Pattern and promise of life

When we receive Jesus in the Eucharist it changes us if we open our hearts to the power of his love. St. Augustine said we "*become what we receive*." Jesus helps us become a new person patterned after himself. We are not changed by "magic" but by allowing Jesus to inspire and strengthen us. We become "other Christs" as we go beyond ourselves in serving the mental, physical and spiritual needs of others.



The grains of wheat ground into bread and the grapes crushed into wine are excellent signs of Christ's death. When they become his body and blood they also are a *promise of hope for eternal life*. Just as wheat grains and grape seeds contain the hope of new life within them, Christ in the Eucharist is our hope of living with God forever. We eat his body and drink his blood as God's promise that we will live in glory after death as Jesus promised: " '...whoever eats this bread will live forever' " (John 6:51).



## More about this sacrament

The Church uses many names for this sacrament:

- **Breaking of the Bread:** The first disciples called it this because Jesus blessed, broke and shared bread with them.
- **Eucharist:** This word means "thanksgiving" in Greek. With Christ we give thanks to God for saving us.
- **Lord's Supper:** This recalls the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died.
- **Liturgy:** This word means "work" in Greek and describes *public works, like roads or water service*. It is used to describe the *work* of God's people as they worship together.
- **Mass:** This word is from the Latin "missa" meaning *dismissal*, The people are sent out to witness to the gospel.
- **The Sacrifice of the Mass:** This name focuses on the sacrifice of Christ that was "*once for all*" (Hebrews 9:12). His sacrifice on Calvary is the same sacrifice of his body and blood during the Eucharist. They are one and the same.

Because the Catholic Church believes that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, the Church treats it with great reverence. The *hosts* (consecrated bread) that remain after Mass are kept in the *tabernacle*. This is a gold-lined cabinet that has a candle burning near it always as a sign that Christ is present. Eucharistic ministers bring the Eucharist to the sick and those who cannot attend Mass. They carry the *hosts* in a little gold-lined container called a *pyx* (Greek for *little box*).

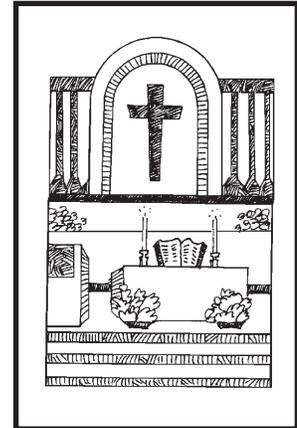
In a special ceremony called *Benediction* (Latin for *blessing*), the Eucharist is placed in a gold container for all to see. This is called a *monstrance* (Latin for *display* or *show*). The priest and people gather for this special ceremony to honor Christ present among them. They share prayers and hymns about the great love that Christ shares with his people in the Eucharist. During Benediction the priest lifts up the monstrance and blesses the people with it. Then the Eucharist is returned to the tabernacle.

# Understanding the Celebration of the Eucharist

## The Mass

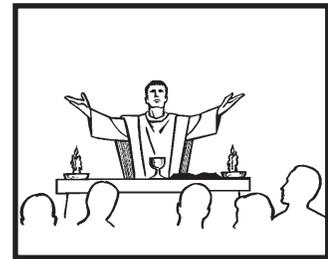
### The Place of Worship

*The Mass can take place almost anywhere the priest and people gather. During the pope's visit when the crowd was too large for a cathedral, it was held in a stadium or open field. In the early days of the Church, the followers of Christ could not worship openly for fear of being arrested and killed so they met secretly in homes or even in underground cemeteries called "catacombs" where the tomb of a martyr was sometimes used for an altar. Usually, it is held in a special place set aside for worship such as a chapel or church building. These can be large or small but they have the same things for worship: an altar, a chair for the priest, and a stand for reading the scriptures and the gospel. A crucifix and candles are placed near the altar. These things make up the sanctuary or central place of worship. Because the tabernacle holds the eucharistic bread, it is the custom to keep a lamp or candle burning next to it. This means that Christ is really present. Prison chapels may not allow this.*



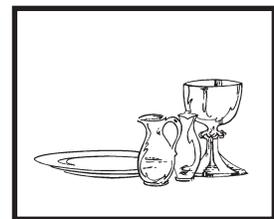
### Clothing

*The priest wears special clothing called vestments to signal that he is not acting on his own, but is a minister of the Church and of Christ. This ancient custom goes back to the days of Moses who taught the priests to wear special clothing when they served in worship. The style of today's vestments also connects the Church with that of the first Christians. The white tunic or alb ("alba" - Latin for white) was used as everyday clothing; the stole ("stola" - Latin for long robe) is a long narrow piece of cloth worn over the shoulders to symbolize authority; and the chasuble ("casula" - Latin for little house) is the outer covering worn by early Christians. The colors of the priest's clothing also have special meaning: white stands for joy, green for growth, purple for penance, and red for blood shed for Christ or the fire of the Holy Spirit.*



### Sacred Objects

*The cup that contains the wine and the blood of Christ is called a chalice ("calix" - Latin for cup). The plate that holds the bread and body of Christ is called a paten ("patena" - Latin for bread plate). Sometimes during worship incense is burned to symbolize the mysterious presence of God and our prayer rising to God. The sweet-smelling incense ("incensum" - Latin for burning) is placed on hot coals. The little glass bottles that contain the water and wine are called cruets ("crué" - Old English and French for bottle ).*



## ORDER OF THE MASS

### INTRODUCTORY RITES

*The Mass begins as the priest, deacon and reader are led in by servers carrying a crucifix and candles. The deacon carries the book of the Gospels.*

- Entrance Song

*All those who have gathered stand up to greet the procession with a song in praise of God.*



- Greeting

*The priest and people make the sign of the cross together, and greet one another;*

- Penitential Rite

*The priest invites everyone to recall their sins in order to prepare to worship God; the prayer “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy” expresses their sorrow, and the priest then offers a prayer of forgiveness.*

- Gloria

*This prayer which can be said or sung is from the words the angels sang at the birth of Christ: “Glory to God in the highest.”*

- Opening Prayer

*The priest invites everyone to join him as he offers a short prayer; the people answer “Amen” which is a Hebrew word meaning “so be it, or yes we agree.”*

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

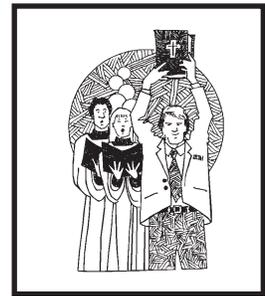
- Scripture Readings

*The first reading on Sundays is usually from the Old Testament and is followed by a psalm.*

*The second reading is from the Acts of the Apostles or the letters of the New Testament.*

*This is followed by the Alleluia or Gospel Acclamation.*

*The final reading is taken from one of the gospels.*



- Homily

*A homily, or sermon, is a reflection by the priest on what has been read, applying what was heard to the everyday lives of the people.*

- Creed

*After hearing the Word of God and the reflection on it, the priest and people profess their faith with an ancient prayer called a creed (“credo” - Latin for I believe). The creed most often used is the one used at baptism by the early Church and set forth by an early Church council around 325 A.D.*

- Prayer of the Faithful

*After hearing the Word and expressing their faith, the priest and people offer prayers on behalf of others: both spiritual and community leaders, the salvation of all people, and those with special needs.*

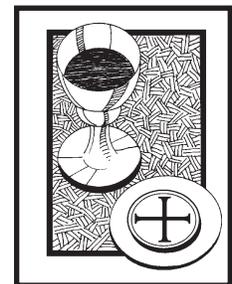
## LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

- Preparation of the Gifts

*The simple gifts of bread and wine, taken from the earth, are brought forward and placed on the altar.*

- Prayer Over the Offerings

*The priest and people pray that God will accept these gifts for the praise and glory of his name, for their good and the good of the Church.*



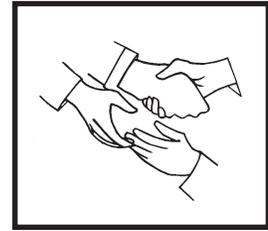
- Eucharistic Prayer

*This is the central prayer of the Eucharist which means “to give thanks to God.” Once again, in this sacred space, priest and people relive the saving death and resurrection of Christ. This long and beau-*

*tiful prayer truly joins Christ with his followers as he offers himself to the Father. It ends with the Memorial Acclamation as the priest raises the bread and cup up for all to see and prays: “Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.” In response the people say “Amen.”*

- Lord’s Prayer

*Together, over the body and blood of Christ, the priest and people prepare for communion by praying the prayer that Jesus taught. What better “daily bread” is there than the Eucharist?*



- Sign of Peace

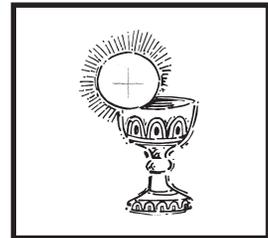
*With a handshake, a hug, or a smile we wish one another Christ’s peace before sharing his body and blood.*

- Breaking of the Bread and Lamb of God

*As the priest breaks the bread, we recall Christ broke the bread and gave it to his disciples at the last supper. The early Church often referred to the Eucharist as “the breaking of the bread.” While the bread is being broken, the words “Lamb of God,” are either said or sung recalling John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus. Just before communion the priest will repeat this testimony: “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”*

- Communion

*As the people come forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ with the proper state of mind and heart, they encounter Christ’s Real Presence. The bread is received in the hand or on the tongue, and the cup is shared by all who wish to drink from it. After receiving, a time of silent prayer follows.*



- Prayer After Communion

*Then the priest invites everyone to share a short, closing prayer.*

## CONCLUDING RITES

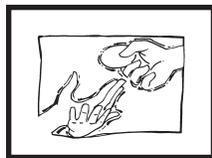
*The Mass comes to a close very simply. Everyone has received spiritual nourishment by hearing the Word of God and sharing the Body and Blood of the Lord.*

- Blessing

*The priest blesses the people “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

- Dismissal

*Then the priest or deacon announces: “The Mass is ended, go in peace.” Now the challenge to live a life based on the Eucharist begins, because the faithful followers of Christ are called to share what they have received. They are called to carry the gospel into their daily lives, to all those they meet.*



## HOW TO RECEIVE THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is a great gift but sharing it means a serious responsibility:

*“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.” (I Corinthians 11: 27)*

We should prepare our minds and hearts in prayer, and be *free of serious sin* (mortal sin) before we receive Communion. This means that we must confess this sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Otherwise, less serious sin (venial sin) is taken away when we receive Communion with a humble and contrite heart. We also should *fast from food for one hour* before receiving Communion.

# The Sacrament of Reconciliation

“ *The LORD on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die* ’ ” (2 Samuel 12:13).

## Understanding the Bible and Reconciliation

### The fall from grace

Studying this sacrament takes us back to the very beginning of human life. *Genesis* tells the story of how the first man and woman chose their own way over God’s way. Because of this first sin, the human race got off to a bad start and never recovered until God stepped in. As scripture says:

“*True, I was born guilty,  
a sinner, even as my mother conceived me*” (Psalm 51:7).

It is like Dominoes - in which the first piece falls against the next one until a chain reaction brings the whole line of dominoes down. God did not create people to be sinners. He gave us a *will (the power to decide)* so that we could be *free to love*. Without free will there can be no love. Free will has a built-in risk, however. It also allows us to choose what is bad and all that goes with it. Like Adam we may try to blame another, or society, or our upbringing for “making” us sin, but we sin by our own *choice*.



Sin is both *private* and *social*. It is *private* because we are responsible for choosing to do something wrong. Sin also is *social* because it brings harm not only to ourselves but to others. This is the case when we hurt or kill others, ruin their reputation, steal what others have, misuse alcohol or drugs and cause harm to ourselves and others, misuse sex and treat others as things not persons, lie and cheat, take revenge on others for what they did to us or those we love. Sin also is social when we give in to group pressure and go along with others who are doing wrong. Even refusing or neglecting to help others in need is a sin. The truth is, we sin *against God (Psalm 51:6)*, and *against ourselves and others* because we are God’s creation. Sin makes us less than God’s plan for us. We end up hating ourselves for what we have become. And self-hatred continues the cycle of violence as we strike at others who remind us of our own failure.

The list of crimes, cruelty, and injustice in this world is a long one. At its worst a life of sin kills our souls as well as the bodies: “*For the wages of sin is death...*” (*Romans 6:23*). There is hope however. Paul wrote: “*For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous*” (*Romans 5:19*).

### A reason for hope

In spite of our sins there is hope for a better life. Paul writes: “*...where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more*” (*Romans 5:20*). God offers a way out of our prison of hate and lies through the door of love and truth. God gave us a *gift* (that is what *grace* means). It is a gift we do not deserve—God’s only Son who became one of us, gave up his own will and obeyed his Father to free us from our sins. The crucified and risen Christ is God’s *sign* that if we truly repent we can be forgiven (no matter what we have done to ourselves or others). In spite of everything God can heal our lives, as Peter recalled when he used the words of *Isaiah 53:50* to describe Jesus: “*He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed*” (*1 Peter 2: 24*).

If we think that we are hopeless and can never be forgiven, we should remember the criminal crucified with Jesus who repented at the last minute: “*Then he said: ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’*” (*Luke 23:42-43*). God brings good out of evil, even the evil of human sins. Because of our sins God sent Jesus. That is why the Church sings at Easter time: “*O happy fault that merited such a redeemer!*”

## A story of repentance

There is another story of repentance in *Luke 15:11-32*. Jesus tells about a son who decides to take all the money he inherited from his father and head out on his own. All he wanted was to “party” and make a big impression on others. Eventually his money ran out and so did his friends. They were not real friends because they only stayed around while he could pay for things. After all his money was gone, he went to work on a farm feeding pigs. He got so hungry that he wished the farmer would let him eat the pigs’ food. Only after he hit bottom, did the son come to his senses. He realized that he had been acting like a fool and needed to go home. He thought about what he would say to his father: *“I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son’ ”* (*Luke 15: 18-19*). So he started for home. Long before he got there, the father was watching for him. As his eyes looked down the road he caught sight of his son walking toward him. His heart was so full of joy that before his son could speak he *“ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him”* (*Luke 15: 20*). Not only that, he held a big party to celebrate his return home. This is a story about everyone of us who have run away from God, ruined ourselves and hurt others. We are like the son who *“...was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found”* (*Luke 15:32*). As Jesus taught, there is great rejoicing in heaven when even one sinner returns home to God.



## God’s calls us to repent

There are many passages in the Old Testament that show how this sacrament is rooted in God’s call to repent and be forgiven. Here are only a few:

*“Turn and be converted from all your crimes, that they may be no cause of guilt for you. Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord GOD. Return and live!”* (*Ezekiel 18:30-32*).

*“Yet even now, says the LORD,  
return to me with your whole heart,  
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning.  
Rend your hearts, not your garments,  
and return to the LORD, your God.  
For gracious and merciful is he,  
slow to anger, rich in kindness,  
and relenting in punishment.”* (*Joel 2:12-13*),

*“Turn away your face from my sins;  
blot out all my guilt.  
A clean heart create for me, God;  
renew in me a steadfast spirit”* (*Psalms 51:11-12*).

The *New Testament* describes the forgiveness that Jesus announced to all who would listen. His ministry of forgiveness continues through his apostles who watched how Jesus forgave sins:

*“Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?”* (*Matthew 9:5*). Jesus went on to show them, by curing the paralytic, that he had the authority to forgive sins. His plan was to reach many more lives with this same forgiveness—people in every time and place—so he passed this authority on to his apostles and their successors. The Church is faithful to this plan of forgiveness.

*“After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: ‘This is the time*

of fulfillment. *The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel'* ” (Mark 1:15). The message of the gospel is that if we repent there is forgiveness of our sins.

## Faith and forgiveness

At the very first moment that Jesus began to preach the gospel, he linked *forgiveness* and *faith* together: “ *Repent, and believe in the gospel'* ” (Mark 1:15).

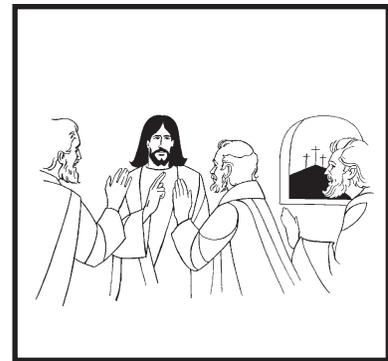
The woman who came to Jesus and washed his feet with her tears was a sinner according to the other people at the table. But Jesus could see her heart and how much love she had. He also knew how much she wanted to change. So he stood by her, and defended her in the face of her critics. “*He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The others at the table said to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' But he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'* ” (Luke 7: 48-50).

In the stories of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) and the woman who washed the feet of Jesus (Luke 7:36-50) we see how Jesus tells the women that their faith saved them. They were healed in heart and soul because *they believed that they could be forgiven*. In the same way the prodigal son believed in his father’s mercy. Jesus teaches us that God’s mercy is there for us all, no matter what we have done. Christ tells all of us as he told the woman accused of adultery: “ *Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more'* ” (John 8:11).

It is a terrible thing to be told “*you are no good, you will never amount to anything, you are hopeless.*” Yet this is not how Christ treated people then and now. In God’s eyes we always have value and hope. Our faith in God is possible because God has faith in us. If we understand this we understand the gospel.

## The power to forgive

Through the *Sacrament of Reconciliation* the sins we commit after Baptism are forgiven. This is rooted in the promise Jesus made after he rose from the dead. He appeared to his disciples who were hiding behind locked doors, afraid of the authorities. Maybe they also were afraid of Jesus because they ran off and left him during his arrest and execution. When Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst, he not only forgave them but gave them the power to forgive others: “[*Jesus*] *said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'* And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘*Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*’ ” (John 20:21-23).



Luke ends his gospel with Jesus instructing his disciples to continue his ministry of forgiveness: “*Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And he said to them, 'Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem'* ” (Luke 24:45-47).

To repeat, the Church is only doing what Christ told his disciples to do: “*...whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (Matthew 18:18).

Ever since that time the Church, in the name of Christ, has used this power to bring forgiveness and peace to countless people: “*And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation,...So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us*” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

# Understanding the Church and Reconciliation

## Why we confess our sins

*If baptism has given us a new life in Christ, why does the Church teach us to confess our sins to a priest in order to receive forgiveness? Why confess to another human being? What is the purpose of confession?*

Even though we have been baptized, it is not easy to change overnight. We can be addicted to our sins and it takes time and the constant help of God to heal us completely of our faults and weaknesses. When our bodies fall sick, it can take many doses of medicine for them to get better. It is like that in our spiritual lives too. We make promises, do well for awhile, but then we suffer setbacks. This sacrament gives us the chance to start over again.



Something good happens when we share what is heavy on our hearts with another human being who listens to us. As we hear ourselves speak the truth there is great relief. It is common for people who share a secret with another person to say: “*Promise you won’t tell anyone.*” Although we need to share what is locked up inside us, to let go of the burden, we will only do this with someone we trust. The *seal of confession* means that we can trust the priest not to tell anyone what we say to him. He has made a solemn promise never to share what someone confesses even if it means he might be punished. What he has heard remains between the person who has confessed and God.

Confession is not new—it is as old as the Old Testament. In 2 *Samuel* 12:13 we read that David confessed his sins of adultery and murder to the prophet Nathan: “*Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ Nathan answered David: ‘The LORD on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die.’*” In the New Testament we read in *James* 5:15-16 that a sick person should be visited by representatives of the Church to be anointed with oil and “*If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*”

## The examination of conscience

Before we confess our sins, we need to *examine our conscience* in order to understand the things we have done wrong. This means we must take an honest look at ourselves to see how we have disobeyed the 10 commandments and Christ’s teachings. This is not easy to do so we need God’s help:

*“More tortuous than all else is the human heart,  
beyond remedy; who can understand it?  
I, the LORD, alone probe the mind  
and test the heart,...” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).*

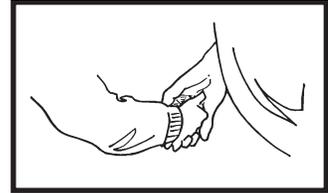
In a way, examining our consciences brings us back to Adam and Even in the garden. When God came looking for them he called out: “*‘Where are you?’*” (*Genesis* 3:9). God’s question means “*What have you done to yourselves?*” It is a question that we need to ask ourselves too: “*Where are we? Are we truly happy with where we are in life? Are we doing what we are supposed to do? Are we proud of what we have done with the life we have been given?*” Even as we focus on the wrongs we have done, we also need to look at the big picture of our lives. God wants to heal our *lives* through the power of this sacrament. A good way to examine ourselves is to think about each commandment and ask ourselves if we have disobeyed them in any way. As we do this, we must know that the Church teaches that some sins are more serious than others. The sins that are not so serious are called *venial* sins. We may be impatient, bend the truth a little, act disrespectfully toward another person, or steal a book. These things weaken our friendship with God but they do not end it. The sins that are more serious are called as *mortal* sins because they “kill” or break off our relationship with God and others. This is a way of saying that the greatest disaster is to separate ourselves from God. Jesus gave examples of serious sin in *Matthew*

15:19: “...murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy.’ ” The Church also teaches that *three things* must be present if a sin is mortal: 1) it must be *serious*, 2) we must *know* that it is serious, and 3) we must *consent* to it. If any one of these is missing we are not guilty of a mortal sin. Facing our sins takes humility and honesty because there are no lies before God, for God is truth. So we stand before God in the light of truth just as we are, as the psalm states:

“If you, LORD, mark our sins,  
LORD, who can stand?  
But with you is forgiveness...” (Psalm 130:3-4).

## The call to help others

Once we have repented and been forgiven by God, we are partners with God in sharing his forgiveness with others. Jesus is very clear in his preaching and in his parables that we in turn are to forgive others. In fact, God’s forgiveness is tied up with our forgiveness of those who have offended us. This is the point of the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus describes how the king took pity on his servant and forgave his debt. But because the servant did not forgive his fellow servant in the same way, he was brought back to the king and made to repay all that he owed: “ ‘So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart’ ” (Matthew 18:35).



God even uses our own weakness and failure as a reminder to reach out and help others. Jesus knew Peter better than he knew himself and that Peter would turn away from him during his trial and death. Even so, on the night before he died Jesus told him: “ ‘...I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers’ ” (Luke 22:32). It should give us great comfort and courage to realize that Peter, the apostle Jesus chose to lead the Church, failed his loyalty test. Yet through forgiveness Peter overcame his weakness and went on to lead Christ’s Church.

## Penance and repairing the harm

An important part of this sacrament is the *penance* the priest gives us before we leave. Penance means doing something to make up for our sins. Because our sins cause harm to others, repenting involves righting the wrong in some way. If it involves facing those we hurt and making it up to them it is called *justice*. When it is possible, we return to the person we have hurt, listen to them and tell them we are sorry. If we cannot meet with them we can write a letter to them. If we took something that was not ours we should return it. If we destroyed what belonged to someone we should replace it. If we told a lie we should try to set things straight. Doing these things goes a long to make things right. Such actions restore dignity and justice to the other person. We often blame others for what we have done, but it takes courage and humility to accept responsibility. Sometimes, when we can’t do any of these things, we can only accept the consequences of our actions. In that case the penance may include fasting, praying or doing something generous for someone even if they are not the victim of our deed. Penance might be something positive like staying away from television and using the time to read good books. This shows our sincerity of heart and our desire to make things better if we could. As always, God sees our hearts and knows what is in them. Look up *Ezekiel 33:14-16* for a beautiful reading on repentance and justice.

One of the great prayers of repentance in the Bible is *Psalm 51*. It is one of the *seven penitential* psalms (*Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143*). It is a human being’s cry from the heart for mercy:

“My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit;  
God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart” (Psalm 51:19).

# Understanding the Rite of Reconciliation

## Place of Celebration

There are three ways to carry out this rite: 1) for *one person* in which only the priest and the person confessing are present (this takes place in a confessional or reconciliation room where they face each other or speak through a screen), 2) for *several persons* who participate in a prayer service that is followed by individual confession and absolution, and, 3) for a *whole group* in which the priest gives absolution without individual confessions. This happens only in times of great danger or serious need.



## Time of Celebration

Any day is a good day to repent. Lent is also a good time to turn away from sin, give one's life to God and faithfully follow the Gospel.

## Preparing for this Sacrament

It is very important to prepare our minds and hearts for this sacrament. Both the priest and the penitent should pray, especially to the Holy Spirit, to help them make the most of this sacrament. An important way for penitents to get ready is to examine their consciences. This means they should take a careful look at their life to see how they have disobeyed the 10 commandments and Christ's teachings.

## Welcome

The priest welcomes the penitent by making the sign of the cross.

## Reading the Word of God

The priest may read from the Bible about God's mercy and kindness.

## Confessing Our Sins

After giving the time since our last confession, we state the sins we have committed. It is important to know that the *seal of confession* is the church's guarantee that the priest will never tell anyone what he has heard. It is *sealed* in the sacrament.

## Accepting Penance

The priest gives the penitent something to do or pray, in order to make up for their sins. These actions express our sincerity of heart. It is like the story of Jonah: "*When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out*" (Jonah 3:10).

## Prayer for God's Pardon

The moment has come for the penitent to say they are sorry for their sins. This is called *contrition*. They can use their own words or a special prayer that is called the *Act of Contrition*. It goes like this: "*O God, with all my heart I am sorry for my sins. I have sinned against you who are all good and deserve only my love. With your help I promise to not sin again, to do penance and to stay away from whatever leads me into sin.*"

## The Words of Absolution - "I absolve you"

The priest extends his hands over the head of the penitent while he recalls how God reconciled the world to himself through the death and resurrection of his Son and sent the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. Then he says: "*through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*"



## Final Prayer and Dismissal

The priest thanks God for his goodness and then dismisses the penitent with the words: "*The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.*"

*In this simple yet powerful way the person who confesses is reunited with God's infinite love, God's willingness to forgive and the wonderful grace, joy and happiness to be found in the arms of God.*

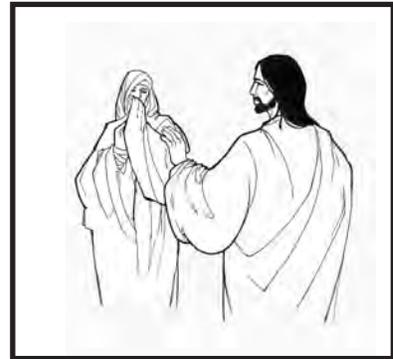
# The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

*“He laid his hands on each of them and cured them” (Luke 4:40).*

## Understanding the Bible and Anointing of the Sick

### Is sickness a punishment from God?

Although some religious leaders at the time of Jesus believed that sick people were being punished for their sins, either known or unknown, Jesus taught that sickness was not a punishment for sin: “*Neither he nor his parents sinned;...*” (John 9:3). Although this seemed wrong at times to the religious leaders, Jesus understood God’s Word better than anyone else. He answered the age-old question that many sick people ask: “*Am I being punished?*” His answer is “*no*” just as it was for the person who wrote *Psalms* 41. In his heart, the sick person relies on God’s mercy and knows that what others say about the reasons for his illness is not true:



*“The LORD sustains them on their sickbed;...” (Psalms 41:4).*

### Jesus and suffering

Even though Jesus healed many people while on earth, he also suffered. He felt hungry, tired, even frustrated when his apostles did not understand him. The agony in the garden was a time of such great suffering that Jesus prayed: “*‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done’*” (Luke 22: 42 ). During his crucifixion he even felt forgotten by God and prayed *Psalms* 22:2 “*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*” (See *Matthew* 27: 46).

Besides death, suffering is one of the greatest mysteries of life. Why anyone suffers is hard to understand. Yet the suffering of Jesus was *part of God’s plan* to save us. In fact, Jesus predicted his suffering and death several times. His apostles either did not understand what he was saying, or refused to accept it. Several times Jesus predicted his own passion: “*‘...The Son of Man must suffer greatly...and be killed and on the third day be raised’*” (Luke 9:22). Others passages are: *Mark* 8:31-33, *Mark* 9:30-32, *Mark* 10:32-34, *Matthew* 16: 21-23, *Matthew* 17: 22-23, *Matthew* 20:17-19, *Luke* 9:44-45, *Luke* 18:31-34. One thing we know for certain—God was able to bring good out of evil when his only Son was killed. After the resurrection Jesus told his disciples: “*‘How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’*” (Luke 24:25-26). The words of the prophets, especially about *the suffering servant*, seem very clear:

*“Yet it was our infirmities that he bore,  
our sufferings that he endured,  
While we thought of him as stricken,  
as one smitten by God and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our offenses,  
crushed for our sins,  
Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole,  
by his stripes we were healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5).*

## The mystery of suffering

Sometimes the mystery of illness and suffering is very heavy and dark. It is like the darkness that gathered while Jesus hung on the cross: “*At noon darkness came over the whole land...*” (Mark 15:33). There may be nothing else to do but stay with the sick person and pray for them. In this we have the example of Mary who stood next to the cross, unable to help her Son. At such moments faith is tried to the ultimate. All we can do is hang on in prayer. Sometimes no prayer is possible except the cry of Jesus from the cross: “*‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’*” (Matthew 27:46). This takes the courage of the martyrs who entered the arena to face torture and death. They relied totally on the Spirit of God to see them through to eternal life. Peter, who also gave his life for the gospel, had this to say about suffering:

*“For whenever anyone bears the pain of unjust suffering because of consciousness of God, that is a grace...But if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps”* (1 Peter 2:19-21).

## Your faith has saved you

There are different kinds of healing—*physical healing (of our bodies)* and the *inner healing (of our minds, hearts and souls)*. Today medicine often heals the physical body, but God alone has the power to heal us spiritually. Several times Jesus told people that *their faith had saved them*.

A woman who had been suffering for twelve years and was “unclean” because of her illness, reached out to touch the cloak of Jesus. (This was an ancient way of asking a favor). “*She said to herself, ‘If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured.’*” (Matthew 9:21). As soon as she touched it she knew she was cured. But when Jesus turned to ask who had touched him, she fell at his feet in fear. Jesus said: “*‘Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction’*” (Mark 5:34).

The blind man cried out to Jesus for help even though others told him to be quiet. And when Jesus called for him, he got up and walked toward Jesus even though he could not see. “*Jesus told him, ‘Go your way; your faith has saved you.’ Immediately he received his sight...*” (Mark 10:52).

After Jesus told the ten lepers he had just healed to show themselves to the priests, they discovered on the way that they were healthy again. However, only one leper came back to give thanks at the feet of Jesus who said: “*Stand up and go; your faith has saved you*” (Luke 17:19).

When Jesus returned to Nazareth where he grew up, the people who should have known him well failed to see God acting in his words and deeds. In fact, they rejected him totally. The gospel tells us “*And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith*” (Matthew 13:58).

Faith in these examples has more to do with surrendering the heart, trusting in God’s power at work in Jesus who heals both body and soul. Therefore, we have a role in our healing. If our hearts are closed to God our attitude creates a barrier. This makes it hard for God to break through our resistance and heal us. God respects our free will even though he wants to make us whole. On the other hand, if our hearts and minds are open and trusting we help prepare the way for God’s power to act in us.



# Understanding the Church and Anointing of the Sick

(Read more about the sacrament of anointing in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1499-1532).

## Continuing the ministry of Christ

In the gospels we see how people were drawn to the compassion and healing power of Jesus: “...they brought to him all who were sick with various diseases and racked with pain, those who were possessed, lunatics, and paralytics, and he cured them” (Matthew 4:24). Christ still continues this ministry of healing through the sacrament of *the anointing of the sick*. Through the care and concern that his Church has for the sick, he still cares for the bodies and souls of people in every age. In the following passage we see how important this sacrament was to the early Church and is to the Church now:

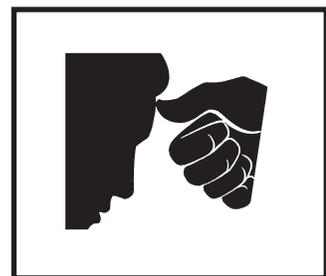
*“Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the Church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven”* (James 5:14-15).

## Anointing and forgiveness

We also learn from *James* that the *presbyter* (or priest) anoints the sick person with oil in Christ’s name, and if the person is guilty of any sins they are forgiven and the person’s body is entrusted to God’s healing care. This passage reminds us that when Jesus healed he did not focus on the body only, but on the whole person—*body, mind and spirit*. This is what he did when a paralyzed man was brought to him: “...he said to the paralytic, ‘Child, your sins are forgiven’ ” (Mark 2:5). Getting rid of the symptoms of illness is one thing—something modern medicine can do. But helping the whole person and healing their heart and soul is another matter. That kind of total healing is what Jesus did with each person he met. He left them a better person, at peace with themselves, others and God. And that is what the *anointing of the sick* is meant to do also.

## Who does the anointing?

Since the anointing of the sick is carried out by the Church in the name of Christ it is done by a priest who has been called to represent Christ—just as the apostles were: “He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority...” (Mark 6:7). Following the command of Jesus “...they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them” (Mark 6:13). These words describe not only the special calling of certain members of the Christian community to act in Christ’s name, but also exactly what the Church does today as it anoints with oil *many who are weak from old age, seriously sick or in danger of death*.



## The sick are not alone

Anointing helps those who are sick overcome the feeling of being alone. The presence of the priest and those gathered with the sick person remind us that we still belong to God’s people. Anointing with oil also brings us in touch not only with the priest but also with all believers. During the long hours and days when we are sick, as others go about their daily routine, we may be tempted to feel forgotten. Therefore, anointing is a wonderful way to reduce this feeling of isolation. It reminds us that God cares about us.

When we are sick and suffering we experience it in our own body, and we may feel that others do not understand the suffering we are enduring. We feel much like the person in the Bible who wrote:

“ *Come, all you who pass by the way,  
look and see  
Whether there is any suffering like my suffering,  
which has been dealt me...* ” (Lamentations 1:12).

This sacrament reminds us that the whole Church is praying for us, asking God to watch over us, forgive our sins and restore us to physical and spiritual health. If we are dying this sacrament helps us meet death with peace of mind and heart. Like all the sacraments, anointing of the sick is not a magic ritual but a *personal encounter with Christ*. In his presence we experience his love, grace and peace as we place all our trust in him. It is comforting to know that no matter what happens Christ is our savior who has promised us eternal life.

### Accepting our humanity

Illness can be a time of grace. When we fall sick it reminds us that we are human and not so powerful. Sometimes people who were sick say “*I felt like I was going to die.*” Sickness brings us face to face with the fact that we are all going to die one day. As we are in bed relying on others to care for us, we feel helpless. If no one comes to visit us, we feel alone.

Very often people who fall sick change the way they live once they recover. Francis of Assisi returned home after defeat in battle, fell very ill, and after he got well was a new person. He gave his life entirely to Christ and followed his gospel for the rest of his life. There are many other examples of people who became very ill and returned to health with a clear idea of how they wanted to live from then on. God often comes closer to us when we are sick than at any other time. We are not busy or distracted, but alone and quiet. Our minds and hearts can be open to listening to God’s Spirit. We begin to see ourselves in the light of eternity and God’s plan for us, We begin to *realize what is important*—living healthier in body, mind and spirit, spending more time with those we love and taking time to enjoy the beauty of God’s creation.

**Sickness**  
is so limited...  
It cannot cripple  
**Love,**  
It cannot shatter  
**Hope,**  
It cannot corrode  
**Faith,**  
It cannot destroy  
**Peace,**  
It cannot ruin  
**Friendship,**  
It cannot suppress  
**Memories,**  
It cannot silence  
**Courage,**  
It cannot invade the  
**Soul,**  
It cannot conquer the  
**Spirit.**  
It cannot steal  
**Eternal Life,**  
*Adapted from an  
unknown author*

### Following Christ

“*Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it’*” (Matthew 16:24-25). This sacrament helps the sick realize that they are sharing in the passion of Christ. We share not only in his suffering and death, but also in his resurrection. The same Spirit who was at work in Jesus and strengthened him during his sufferings, and who raised him from the dead, is also with us as we are suffering. Our illness is powerless to overcome our spirits if we rely on his presence to strengthen us. God’s Spirit can empower us to endure our suffering peacefully, conquer sadness and despair with joy, and place all our hope in God’s love and mercy if we are facing death.

### Caring for Christ in the sick

Caring for the sick is an opportunity for us as the followers of Christ, to serve Christ in the persons of the those who are sick. We will receive the inspiration to do this from meditating on Christ’s description of the final judgment: “*When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’* ” (Matthew 25:39-40).

# Understanding the Rite of Anointing of the Sick

*What follows is an example of how the Church provides this sacrament. It is a wonderful way to show loving concern for the person who is sick. Anointing can be given to one person or to an entire group of people.*

## **Greeting**

The priest enters the sick person's room and greets everyone, wishing them God's peace and friendship. If the sick person is going to receive Communion, the priest places it on a nearby table and joins in adoration with those who are there.

## **Sprinkling with holy water**

The priest sprinkles the sick person and the others with holy water, recalling how baptism brings redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ.

## **Instruction**

Then the priest speaks about Christ who is present in their midst; how the sick came to him to be healed; and how Christ died for them. He reminds them of the comforting words of scripture.

## **Penitential rite**

The priest asks the sick person, if they are able, as well as the others gathered, to prepare themselves for the penitential rite by recalling their sins and turning to God for forgiveness. Together they pray for mercy, healing and strength, and confess that they have sinned in thought, word and deed. They ask Mary, the angels and the saints to pray for them that God may have mercy on them, forgive them and bring them to everlasting life.

## **Liturgy of the Word**

Readings from the Bible are followed by a few moments of silence. Then the priest shares a few words about the readings with the sick person and the others who have gathered. The priest explains how God's healing power is in his Word and in this anointing which is a sign of his love and mercy.

## **Liturgy of Anointing**

### *Litany*

The priest asks God, through several short prayers that follow, to strengthen the sick person through this anointing, to free the sick person from all harm, as well as from sin and temptation. He asks God to help all those who take care of the sick, and to give this sick person relief from suffering as well as the blessing of life and health. As we learned in Sacrament of Confirmation *Christ* means *anointed*, therefore this anointing means our pain and sickness are united with the sufferings of Christ.

### *Laying on of Hands*

Without any words, the priest places his hands on the sick person's head.

### *Prayer Over the Oil*

Then the priest offers a prayer over the oil to be used. He praises God the *Father* for sending his Son to live among us; praises the *Son* who humbly shared our humanity and heals our infirmities; and praises the holy *Spirit* whose power strengthens us in our weakness. He asks God to be merciful to the person who is suffering and comfort them in their weakness as the Church anoints them with oil.

### *Anointing*

As the priest anoints the sick person with blessed oil on the forehead and hands, he asks God to free them from sin and give them health. He does this in the name of Christ and his whole Church.

### *Prayer After Anointing*

The priest offers a prayer, asking God to look with compassion on the sick person who shares in the suffering of Christ. He prays that God will bring healing of body and spirit, provide strength and hope in the midst of suffering, and acceptance of God's will.

### *The Lord's Prayer*

The priest invites everyone to pray the Our Father together.

## **Liturgy of Holy Communion**

After Communion is given to the sick person and to others who have gathered, the priest offers a final prayer asking that the body and blood of Christ may be a remedy for their bodies and souls.

## **Conclusion**

### Blessing

The sick person and those who have gathered are blessed by the priest with words of comfort, hope, health and salvation. If any of the Eucharist remains the priest blesses the sick person and everyone who is present with it.

# The Sacrament of Marriage

“ ‘So they are no longer two but one flesh’ ” (Matthew 19:6).

## Understanding the Bible and Marriage

The Bible teaches us that married love of a husband and wife is a beautiful *gift* of God and a wonderful *sign* of God’s own love for his people. God created us to love and be loved, and through that love God shares his power to create other human beings:

*“God created man in his image;  
in the divine image he created him;  
male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them, saying to them: ‘Be fertile and multiply;  
fill the earth...’ ” (Genesis 1:27-28).*

God creates and then brings together the first human beings: “*The LORD God said: ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.’ ” (Genesis 2:18). “When he brought her to the man, the man said:*

*‘This one, at last, is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;...’ ” (Genesis 2:22-23).*



From this story of Adam and Even—who should not *be alone* and should *multiply*—we see why the Church teaches the two-fold purpose of marriage: the love of spouses and the creation of children.

Throughout the Bible marriage is greatly honored. God inspired its authors to use married love as a way to describe how much God loves us. Here is a beautiful poem that stands for God’s love for his people:

*“Set me as a seal on your heart,  
as a seal on your arm;  
For stern as death is love,  
relentless as the nether world is devotion;  
its flames are a blazing fire.  
Deep waters cannot quench love,  
nor floods sweep it away” (Song of Songs 8:6-7).*

The prophets also compared God’s love for his people to the love that a husband and wife share:

*“As a young man marries a virgin,  
your Builder shall marry you;  
And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride  
so shall your God rejoice in you” (Isaiah 62:5).*

For that reason the prophets called it adultery when the nation was unfaithful to its covenant with God:

*“Eager to sin, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and wood” (Jeremiah 3:9).*

Jesus also used the joy and happiness of a wedding to describe his ministry. He called himself the *bridegroom* and described his ministry as a wedding party. When asked why his disciples did not fast like those of John the baptist he answered: “ ‘Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast’ ” (Mark 2:19).

Jesus chose the wedding at Cana to begin his public ministry when he turned water into wine: *“Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him” (John 2:11)*. The Church believes that by being at the wedding Jesus blessed marriage itself: *“Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding” (John 2:2)*.

Later on in his ministry, when the Pharisees used the law of Moses to defend divorce, Jesus restored marriage to its original meaning. He turned to *Genesis* to explain what God intended marriage to be:

*“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Mark 10:6-9)*.

Authors of the Bible like Paul offered special words of guidance for Christian spouses: *“Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ...” (Ephesians 5:21)*. Their love should be modeled after the unselfish love of Christ who *“...loved the Church and handed himself over for her...” (Ephesians 5:25)*. Christ’s love for the Church gives Christian spouses the greatest example of love: *“For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body” (Ephesians 5:29-30)*.

The dignity of each person created by God and baptized in Christ is the basis of a true Christian marriage. What is true for all Christians is especially true for husbands and wives: *“...for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28)*.

Therefore, what the Bible teaches about love has special meaning for married people: *“Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:9-10)*.

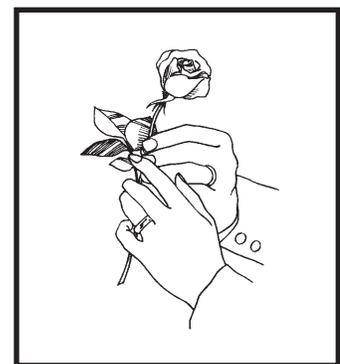
Everything that the followers of Christ do, including marriage, should be inspired by Christian love. The following is from one of the most beautiful passages on love in the Bible :

*“If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:3-8)*.

For all Christians, including those who are married, God’s love is like the air we breathe or the light that fills our world: *“God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16)*. God was the first to love and teaches us how to love: *“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19)*. This understanding of love also sheds light on what true married love is. Although the world often is confused about sex and love, Christians know that to express love in sexual union is a gift from God. Through sexual union spouses *express their love and cooperate with God in making new people*. Sexual love also is a beautiful and special way that married people honor and praise God: *“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God...” (1 John 4:7)*. Like God’s love married love is seen in the kindness and care spouses show one another. *“No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us” (1 John 4:12)*.



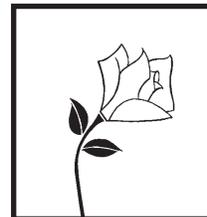
# Understanding the Church and Marriage

(Read more about the sacrament of marriage in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1601-1666)

## A special sign of love

All the sacraments are signs of God's love. They celebrate God's presence in our midst and remind us of his never ending covenant with us. The sacrament of marriage, which celebrates the covenant of life-long love between husband and wife, is a special sign of God's own faithful love:

*“For you said, ‘My love is established forever;  
my loyalty will stand as long as the heavens.  
I have made a covenant with my chosen one;...’ ” (Psalm 89:3).*



For this reason, the Church invites those to be married to make their vows during the Eucharist when the community of believers celebrate the covenant of Christ's body and blood.

## A covenant of love

With the words “I do” the bride and groom freely give their consent to their *covenant* of love. Unlike the other sacraments, the bride and groom perform this sacrament because it is their covenant. The priest is a witness, in the name of Christ and his Church. Like the covenant between God and his people they also promise to be faithful to one other: “...*you shall be my people, and I will be your God*” (Ezekiel 36:28). The greatest covenant of all was made by Jesus. He not only said the words “ *This is my blood of the covenant...* ” (Mark 14:24), he also sealed it with the gift of his life the following day. It is the greatest example of true love:

*“ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' ” (John 15:13).*

Like Jesus who “...*loved them to the end*” (John 13:1), the love we promise with words must be lived out day by day. The wedding ceremony is only the beginning of our life together. During the years to come our love will be tested. Our marriage will be a mixture of joy and sacrifice. As challenging as it is, the Church teaches what Christ taught, that God intended marriage to last a life-time.

## Preparing for marriage

Planning the details of a wedding can demand much of our attention—*who will be invited, what food to serve, where the reception will be and where they will go for their honeymoon*. Important as these details seem they are only one small part of preparing for marriage. Weddings can be simple or fancy but *what we really know about each other, the vows we make, the depth of our love, our openness to children and the life we intend to share* are the most important of all. Because it is for a life-time choosing a partner is the most important part of preparing. We must be clear about true love, what the roles of husband and wife should be and what it takes to raise children. Our partner should be someone who can make and keep a promise and who is able to be unselfish. It is important to understand what makes a healthy relationship: learning to communicate and resolve conflicts, making enough time for one another, praying together. Creating a lasting marriage and healthy family-life also means that we must sometimes deal with things that threaten our happiness: *unhealthy roles of men and women, one person dominating or threatening the other, differences in raising children, abuse of a spouse or child (emotional, physical and sexual), alcohol and drug abuse, emotional or mental illness, severe stress, and long-time separation*. Any one of these issues can tear a couple and family apart.

## True love

There are many songs and stories about being in love, looking for love or the heart-ache of lost love or what love is. So many people seem to have a hard time understanding what true love is. True love seems to be hard to find and even harder to keep. The number of marriages that break up is very high. Yet God created us to love and be loved, “*The one who fashioned the hearts of them all*” (Psalm 33:15).

In the Bible *Song of Songs* describes human and divine love in beautiful words, but it also says “...stern as death is love” (8:6). The joy of being together and sexual union are excellent ways to honor the Creator who intended sexual union to be good. It is a part of creation “*God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good*” (*Genesis* 1: 31). Sexual union strengthens love and opens marriage to children. But true love also includes loyalty and devotion. While we never stop being our own person, we also must love our spouses by caring for their needs as if they were our own. We must be willing to sacrifice for the one we love. True love means we stay with our spouse in *good times and bad*. The parent who stays at the bedside of a very sick child is tired but *loving*. The person who takes care of a spouse who is paralyzed and can no longer have sex also is *loving*.

A wise, holy person once said, “*Grow or die*” and it is true of married love also. It needs attention not only with flowers and other gifts, but also by sharing time together and caring for one another’s needs. Life becomes very busy especially when children are born and raised. We need to make a living and pay our bills. But if we do not take time to nourish love it may begin to dry up or even die. Words and gifts are not enough (*1 John* 3:18). Saying “*I love you*” is easy, but it does not prove it. What proves love more, saying “*I love you*” after several drinks, or after being up all night with you while you are sick? Spending too much on perfume or jewelry, or coming home tired from a job that supports our family?



## Married and family life

Marriage is not a *done deal* on the wedding day, it is an *ongoing process*. As time passes we learn the difference between *falling in love* and *love that lasts for a lifetime*. Because we do not know what life will bring, vowing to love one another is an act of faith. We know there will be conflict because we are human. There was trouble in the family of Jesus too. Joseph thought about putting Mary away (*Matthew* 1:18-25), and Jesus grieved his parents (*Luke* 2:41-51). Although we may be tempted to run or quit, handling conflict gives us a chance to work for positive change. We learn to face the truth, gain mutual respect and deepen our love. Realizing when things are out of hand and knowing how to get help is very important. Seeing a doctor, entering a rehab program, getting medication, seeking help from a counselor, social worker or someone in the Church are good ways to find help. *Getting help is not a sign of weakness or failure. It means we have the wisdom and courage to do what it takes to keep our love and marriage alive.* Unfortunately, it also may mean separating if nothing more can be done to save the marriage. Nevertheless, in God’s plan marriage is meant to be a path to holiness in which we help one another grow personally and spiritually. Through prayer and scripture we draw strength from the way that Christ loved. Just as Jesus was present at the wedding in Cana and turned water into wine, he is present in our marriage transforming our problems into deeper love. He is the source of strength *in good times and bad*, giving us the grace to face life with wisdom, patience and love.

As married people we have the awesome privilege of participating in the power of the Creator to bring new life into the world. That is another reason why married love is meant to last a lifetime—children need a secure home and the example of loving parents to help them learn how to live and become loving people also. Family life is a school of love teaching us to be unselfish each day. It calls us out of ourselves to show love in practical ways: cooking, cleaning, washing dishes and clothes, shopping and fixing things. These may not be glamorous deeds but they show love real love. The Church also calls the family home a “domestic church” because it is the first place where children learn the values of the gospel: “*Teach them to your children, speaking of them at home and abroad...*” (*Deuteronomy* 11:19). Home is where children learn to read the Bible, pray together and reach out to others in need.

When a family member is in prison it is an extreme challenge for the marriage and the family. It takes renewed strength and devotion on everyone’s part. Whenever possible, quality time should be set aside so that inmates and their children can be together. It is important for spouses to make the best use of their visits to renew their love. This means letting go of the small stuff and focusing on what is most important. When family visits are possible travel and distance can be another challenge. With the lack of touch because of glass barriers, love can be expressed with the eyes and hand gestures, or by simple presence when words are difficult. Letters take on more meaning than ever. Last but not least, loved ones always can share their hearts and souls on *the spiritual bridge of prayer* that joins both worlds.

# Understanding the Rite of Marriage

*The following is an example of what the wedding ceremony is like.*

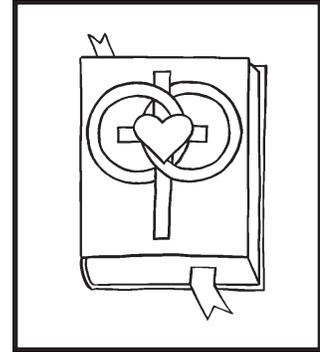
*Usually the Church invites the couple, especially if they are both baptized practicing Christians, to consecrate their marriage during the Mass (Eucharist). This strengthens the idea that the sacrament of marriage is a sign of Christ's great love for the Church.*

## **Entrance**

The priest stands at the altar while the bride processes to the altar usually escorted by her father or another member of the family. The groom stands near the altar waiting.

## **Liturgy of the Word**

The readings from the Old and New Testament, as well as the gospel help everyone gathered to understand marriage as part of creation and God's plan.



## **Homily**

After the Bible readings the priest gives a sermon about the meaning of married love. Marriage has a special place of dignity and beauty in the community. He also explains how true love means they are responsible for one another.

## **THE RITE OF MARRIAGE**

### **Introduction**

While the bride and groom now stand before him, the priest reminds them that they are gathered together in the presence of God and others on this special day so that God, who has already consecrated them in baptism, may deepen their love for one another through the sacrament of marriage. Christ will strengthen them as they take on the responsibilities of marriage, a family, and remaining faithful to one another.

### **Questions**

The priest asks the couple if they have come freely to be married, if they will honor one another for the rest of their days, and if they will accept children and raise them by the laws of Christ and the Church.

### **Consent**

The bride and groom join their right hands as they promise, one at a time, before God and the Church that they will be husband and wife. They promise to remain true to one another in both good and bad times, sickness and health, loving and honoring one another for the rest of their lives. As the priest asks each of these questions, they both say "I do."

After the priest states that they have declared their consent before the Church, he asks God to strengthen them and fill them with his blessings. Then he reminds them of Christ's words about marriage: "Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Matthew 19:6).

## **Blessing of the Rings**

The priest blesses the rings as signs and reminders of the bride and groom's faithful love.

## **Exchange of Rings**

The groom places a ring on his wife's finger as sign of his love and faithfulness; then the bride places a ring on her husband's finger. Usually after that the priest invites them to give each other a kiss a added sign of their love.

## **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The Mass follows as usual.

## **Nuptial Blessing**

After the everyone has prayed the *Our Father* together, the priest turns to the new husband and wife and asks them to join hands. As he extends his hands over them he prays that the Lord who made people in his own image will unite this couple in love and keep them faithful to one another. He asks God to give them strength through the gospel so that they will be living examples for others of the Christian life. He prays that God will help them create a home together, live to a happy old age and one day share God's feast together in heaven.

## **Sign of Peace**

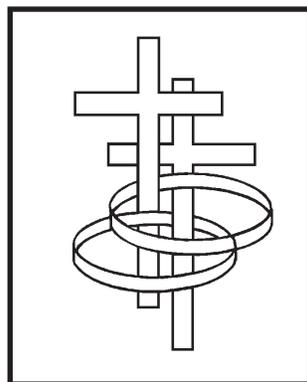
The priest invites everyone, including the married couple, to offer each other a sign of peace.

## **Communion**

The couple who have been joined together in Christ, now receive his body and blood to strengthen them in their new life together. After that, their family and friends also may receive Communion.

## **Solemn Blessing**

At the end of Mass, before everyone else is blessed and dismissed, the priest says a final blessing over the couple. He prays that God will fill them with with his love and keep their love strong and at peace through all the experiences of life. He also prays that they will be witnesses of God's love and help the needy who come to them. He asks the Lord to bless them with many years of happiness together until they enter his eternal kingdom. Then he blesses them and everyone who is there with them *in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*.



# The Sacrament of Holy Orders

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men’ ” (Mark 1:17).*

## Understanding the Bible and Holy Orders

### Priesthood in the Old Testament

The priestly service of the Old Testament set the stage for the priesthood of Christ. Because of their great reverence for God, the people asked Moses to represent them whenever he spoke with God:

*“ ‘Go closer, you, and hear all that the LORD, our God, will say, and then tell us what the LORD, our God, tells you; we will listen and obey’ ” (Deuteronomy 5:27).*

God also instructed Moses to set aside his brother and his sons to lead the people in worship: *“ ‘Aaron and his sons you shall also anoint and consecrate as my priests’ ” (Exodus 30:30).*

*“He also poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head, thus consecrating him. Moses likewise brought forth Aaron’s sons, clothed them with tunics, girded them with sashes...as the LORD had commanded him to do” (Leviticus 8:12-13).* Other passages about priestly service are: *Exodus 29:1-30, Numbers 1:48-53, Joshua 13:13, and Malachi 2:7-9.*

### A priestly people

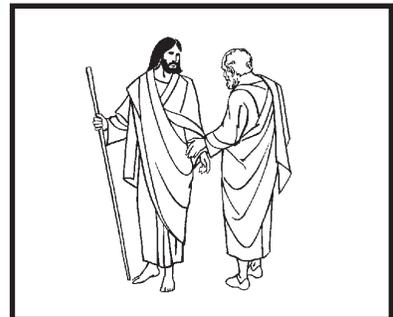
There also is a priestly status that belongs to all God’s people. In the Old Testament God told Moses and the people: *“Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6).* In the New Testament all the followers of Christ are called priestly: *“But you are a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).*

In the New Testament Christ fulfilled the old priesthood because he is *“...Jesus, the Son of God...” (Hebrews 4:14).* He is the one true priest: *“He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself” (Hebrews 7:27).*

Every baptized person belongs to the *priesthood* of Jesus Christ. This is because baptism makes us members of the body of Christ. As his members, we share in the priesthood of Christ who is the head of his body. The Bible also describes Christians as living stones that come together to make up the Church: *“...let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).*

### The ministry of Christ continues

Although all members of Christ’s body are a *priestly people* called to give praise to God and spread the gospel, the Church consecrates certain members through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The word *orders* (from the Latin word *ordo*) means that those who are *ordained* have a *special relationship* with the common priesthood of all believers. Ordained members serve the people and carry out Christ’s work in a more public way. This sacrament has its roots in what Jesus himself did. When he chose the twelve apostles to help him with his mission he chose the first priests *“He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority...” (Mark 6:7).*



*“After this the Lord appointed seventy [-two] others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit” (Luke 10:1).*

This special leadership and service continued after Christ returned to his Father and the holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. This role of leadership was understood as a special gift:

*“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them:...” (Romans 12: 6).*

*“...I am a minister in accordance with God’s stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God...” (Colossians 1:25).*

*“But I have written to you rather boldly in some respects to remind you, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the priestly service of the gospel of God...” (Romans 15:15-16).*

Shortly after the time of the apostles there were three degrees of priesthood—*bishop, presbyter and deacon*. The bishop has the full priesthood while priests are co-workers with him, and deacons are ordained for service. We find many passages that clearly name these three roles:

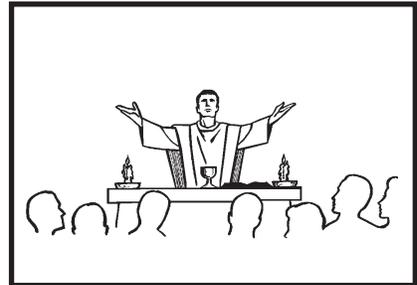
*“...whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Therefore, a bishop must be irreproachable...Similarly, deacons must be dignified...holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Timothy 3:1-2, 8-9).*

*“So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ...Tend the flock of God in your midst, [overseeing] not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3).*

### **Called from among the people**

It is a gift to be called by God from among his people to serve as a priest. It is a call to serve the good of everyone in the Church as well as all human beings. Those in priestly service follow the example of Christ who dedicated his whole life to serving God and his people:

*“Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the Church of God that he acquired with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).*



Although the priest represents Christ he must understand his own human weakness and need for God’s grace. For this reason the priest is ready to treat others with compassion:

*“Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5:1-4).*

As this Bible passage reminds us, bishops, priests and deacons are human like everyone else. They are capable of making mistakes and when they do, the sacraments they perform still give grace to the people who take part in them. People who were baptized are truly baptized and God’s grace is still there for them. The wise St. Augustine explained it in this way—even when light passes through something that is not clean (like a window, for example) it is still pure. Another way of saying it is: even though a bad person says something that is true, it doesn’t change the truth into a lie. It remains the truth. God does not excuse the sin of a priest, but as a good shepherd he always gives his sheep what they need.

# Understanding the Church and Holy Orders

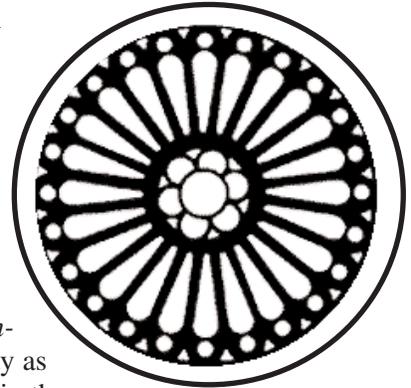
(Read more about the sacrament of holy orders in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1536-1600).

## The meaning of orders

The sacrament of Holy Orders gets its name from the Latin word *ordo* which means *rank* or *place*. Like a band or an orchestra with a leader and musicians who play their own instruments, the Church is organized into special roles too. In this way everyone in the community does their part to keep the whole community faithful to God's call to be holy.

## Gifts to serve the community

Ever since Pentecost the gifts of the Spirit have kept Christ's Church alive and strong so that it survived and grew, from one generation to the next. In the past and now in our day God unites us all into *one* Church because of the *variety of gifts* he gives: "*There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord;...*" (1 Corinthians 12:4-5). As bishops, priests, deacons and lay people, as well as married and single, monks and nuns, we all help create a wonderful unity. At the center of it all is God, holding us together by the Spirit of Christ's love. In many of our Churches there are great, round windows called *rose windows*. They serve as beautiful symbols of our many gifts and our unity as members of the Church. The Sacrament of Holy Orders has its origin in the many gifts the holy Spirit gives the Church. The Spirit has provided these gifts since the beginning of the Church: "*And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of faith...*" (Ephesians 4:11-13).



## The order of “presbyters”

The role of the *pastors and teachers* in the early Church was to preserve the truth that Christ and the apostles taught, and hand it on in a way that was faithful to this truth. This special ministry of teaching and guiding also was called the “*presbyterate*.” (This word comes from the Greek word *presbyteros* meaning *elder*). It described those who had the authority to teach and provide the sacraments: “*Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate*” (1 Timothy 4:14). In our day the presbyterate is called the *priesthood*. At first, only the bishops served in this role. Eventually they appointed priests and deacons (from a Greek word *diakonia* meaning service) to help them as the followers of Christ grew in numbers. In other words, the bishops have the full priesthood but they share this sacred power with their priests and deacons. The bishops share it in the same way they themselves received it, by *laying hands on them*:

“*They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them*” (Acts 6:6).

“*...I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands*” (2 Timothy 1:6).

Because ordination makes a lasting seal, it can never be repeated. Priests and deacons are co-workers and representatives of the bishop whose three-fold ministry is to *teach* (preserve and hand on the gospel), *sanctify* (lead the people to holiness) and *govern* (encourage and give example to his people).

## A special ministry

The ordained priest acts “*in persona Christi*” or “*in the person of Christ.*” This not only means that the priest acts in the name of Christ but also in the name of Christ’s people, the Church. Priests share in Christ’s ministry by building up the Christian community through the sacraments: baptizing new members, confirming their faith, forgiving sins, celebrating the Eucharist, blessing marriages, and anointing the sick and dying. Deacons also serve by baptizing, preaching, proclaiming the gospel during Mass, witnessing marriages, presiding at funerals, and doing many kinds of charitable works in the community such as assisting the poor, youth ministry, comforting the sick and visiting prisons.

### **In the footsteps of the apostles**

Just as Christ was sent by God, so were the apostles he chose given the power to preach the gospel and serve the community of believers. Christ continues this same ministry today through the successors of the apostles. They are the *bishops*—and the priests and deacons they ordain to help them in their ministry. This unbroken *laying on of hands* from the time of the apostles to the bishops of today is called *apostolic succession*. This unbroken line since the time of the apostles also means what we believe today is the faith of the apostles. As Irenaeus wrote: “*True doctrine ought to be found in the tradition received from the apostles, by the bishops or the presbyters instituted by them and who have transmitted it to their successors up to the present time*” (*Adversus Haereses*, III,3,1).

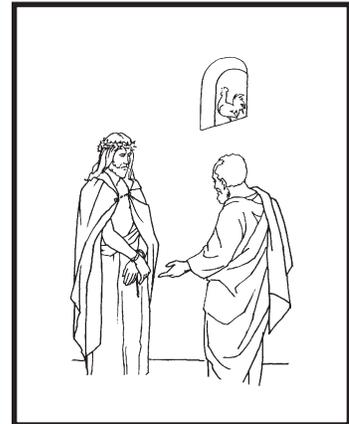
Note: Irenaeus was a famous writer of the early Church. He lived from 130-200 A.D. and knew Polycarp who was a bishop appointed by Peter the apostle.



### **The ministry of Peter**

Apostolic succession also includes the pope who is the successor of Peter the apostle. The role of the *pope* (from the Latin *papa*) has a humble origin in the *call and fall* of Peter. Jesus recognized in this outspoken fisherman the gifts of a leader. He chose him from among the twelve apostles to lead the disciples: “ ‘...upon this rock I will build my Church...’ ” (*Matthew* 16:18). As chief of the apostles Peter also was an example of weakness and repentance. During the arrest of Jesus, Peter denied him three times. That is why after his resurrection Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him:

“*Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ [Jesus] said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’*” (*John* 21:17).



### **The call to be a shepherd**

Jesus strengthened Peter’s faith and then gave him the ministry to strengthen the Church: “*I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers*” (*Luke* 22:32). This is the service that the pope provides for the bishops and whole Church today. The pope serves as the sign of visible unity for the entire world-wide Church. As the “servant of the servants of God” he devotes his life to feeding and strengthening all of Christ’s people:

“...whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...” (*Matthew* 20:26-28).

The pope—along with the bishops, priests and deacons—help the Church grow in holiness through their service to Christ who is our *teacher, priest and shepherd*.

# Understanding the Rite of Holy Orders

Although holy orders includes bishops, priests and deacons, what follows is an example of how a priest is ordained. It usually takes place during the Eucharist on a feast day or a Sunday so as many people as possible can attend. The vestments for the new priest and the blessed oil are made ready. The bishop's chair is placed in front of the altar so that the people can see everything that takes place.



## **Procession**

The procession passes through the Church to the altar. It includes a deacon carrying the book of the gospels, followed by the one to be ordained, then the priests who are attending and finally the bishop.

## **Liturgy of the Word**

The Mass begins as usual. When the readings from scripture are finished, they are not followed by the *Creed* or *Prayers of the Faithful*.

## **ORDINATION**

As soon as the *Gospel* is over the bishop sits in his chair and the ordination begins.

### **Calling of the Candidate**

A deacon calls the candidate to come forward. The candidate answers that he is present, then stands in front of the bishop and briefly bows his head in respect.

### **Presentation of the Candidate**

Then the priest who has been appointed states that the Church is asking the bishop to ordain this person for service as a priest. The bishop asks if he is judged worthy. The priest testifies that, after asking the people and those who trained the candidate, he has been found worthy.

### **Election and Consent**

Then the bishop states that as they rely on the help of God and Christ this person is chosen to be a priest *in the presbyteral order*. Often the people signal their approval by applause.

### **Homily**

After that everyone sits down and the bishop speaks to the people and the candidate about what it means to serve God and his people as a priest. The priest is called to preach the gospel, help the people and celebrate the Eucharist.

### **Examination of the Candidate**

After the bishop is finished speaking, the candidate stands in front of the bishop again. The bishop asks the candidate a series of questions: *Is he ready serve as a fellow worker with the bishops in caring for God's people? Will he faithfully celebrate the sacraments that have been handed down to the Church? Will he carry out in a worthy and wise manner the ministry of preaching the gospel and explaining the faith? Will he consecrate his life to God and the salvation of the people in union with Christ who offered himself as a sacrifice?* The candidate answers "I am" after each question.

### **Promise of Obedience**

Then the candidate kneels before the bishop and places his hands between the bishop's hands. The bishop asks him if he promises respect and obedience to the bishop and those who will follow him one

day as the bishop? The candidate answers “I do.” The bishop prays that God will fulfill the work he has begun in him.

### **Invitation to Pray**

After this everyone stands and the bishop invites them to pray that God will pour out his gifts on this person God has chosen to be a priest.

### **Litany of the Saints**

During this long prayer the candidate lies face down on the floor while the cantors (singers) and people kneel and ask Christ, Mary and the saints for their spiritual help. At the end of the litany, the bishop asks God to pour out the holy Spirit on this servant who is being offered for ordination and to support him with his unfailing love.

### **Laying on of Hands**

When the *Litany* is finished everyone stands while the candidate kneels before the bishop once more. The bishop silently places his hands on the candidate’s head. Next the priests who are present also silently lay their hands on the head of the candidate and then gather around the bishop as he says a prayer of consecration.

### **Prayer of Consecration**

The bishop prays that the work of the priests and bishops will help spread the Gospel to all people of the earth so that all nations will become God’s holy people.

### **Investing with the Stole and Chasuble**

After this prayer the bishop sits down while the new priest stands. The other priests go back to their seats, except for one of them who places a *chasuble* and *stole* on the new priest.

### **Anointing of Hands**

As the new priest kneels before the bishop, the bishop puts *chrism* (blessed oil) on the palms of his hands, praying that as the Father anointed Jesus through the holy Spirit’s power, so may Jesus be with him as he serves God’s people and offers sacrifice to God.

### **Presentation of Gifts**

After the bread and wine are brought to the altar, the bishop hands the chalice and paten (bread plate) to the new priest. The bishop asks him to accept from the people the gifts to be offered to God. He tells him to imitate what he celebrates and to model his life after the cross of Christ.

### **Kiss of Peace**

The bishop offers a gesture and words of peace to the new priest.

### **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The celebration of the Eucharist follows in the usual way. There is only one change during the Eucharistic Prayer. The bishop adds a special prayer for the person who has been ordained that day. He asks God to protect the gifts he has given to this new priest and to give him a successful ministry. *Through the grace of God another person has stepped forward for life-long service to God’s people.*



## REVIEW TEST

After completing all the test pages review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
Be sure to put your name and ID number on each test page.

1. The word *sign* comes from the Latin word \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The sacraments are called signs because they both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ *God's grace*.
3. Name something that is a sign in ordinary life: \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Name 2 things that Jesus used as signs of God's presence and help \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Jesus always cared for people by himself. He never asked for help. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
6. Everything Jesus said and did carried over into the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church.
7. In the same way the Church decided which books belonged in the Bible, it also has named the \_\_\_\_\_ that Christ gave to his Church.
8. What did God use to make his presence known to Moses? \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Not only do the words and actions of the sacraments show how we pray, they show what we \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The three-fold purpose of the sacraments is to help us: grow in holiness, build up the people of God and make donations to the Church \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
11. For ancient Israel and the Church \_\_\_\_\_ brings the past and present into one sacred moment.
12. Which three sacraments are not repeated? \_\_\_\_\_.
13. List the 7 sacraments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
14. What can we learn about the Church by observing how it prays? \_\_\_\_\_.
15. What do the sacraments do for us? \_\_\_\_\_.
16. If the minister of a sacrament has done something bad we will not receive its grace.  
\_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
17. God gave us a will so that we would be free to \_\_\_\_\_.
18. List six created things that the church uses to share God's power in the sacraments \_\_\_\_\_.
19. Give 2 examples of a seal in ordinary life \_\_\_\_\_.
20. Eternal life happens only after we are dead \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
21. Because of his words and actions Jesus is a powerful sign of \_\_\_\_\_.
22. Because Christ acts in and through his Church and its sacraments the Church also can be a \_\_\_\_\_ of God's love and care.



## REVIEW TEST

### Sacrament of Baptism

*After completing all the test pages review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
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1. Baptism is one of three sacraments of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The 3 sacraments of initiation are \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Give 2 meanings of the word "baptize" \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Name one event in the Old Testament that pointed to baptism? \_\_\_\_\_.
5. According to the prophets what made the lives of the people unclean? \_\_\_\_\_.
6. According to *Genesis* who was responsible for original sin? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. How can water stand for both life and death? \_\_\_\_\_.
8. In baptism we die and \_\_\_\_\_ with Christ.
9. What does the white garment given to us in baptism mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. As baptized followers of Christ our light shines only in the words we say. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
11. When we are baptized into the body of Christ what we do to another person is done to \_\_\_\_\_.
12. When we are born again with water and the Spirit, what does *water* stand for? \_\_\_\_\_.  
What does *Spirit* stand for? \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Who is the ordinary minister of baptism? \_\_\_\_\_.
14. In case of emergency who else can baptize? \_\_\_\_\_.
15. What are the 2 ways that people can be baptized? \_\_\_\_\_.
16. Only adults can be baptized. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
17. A person can be baptized many times. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
18. What does RCIA stand for? \_\_\_\_\_.
19. Catechumen is a Greek word that means \_\_\_\_\_.
20. In the second step of RCIA what two prayers are presented to the person who will be baptized?  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.



## REVIEW TEST

### Sacrament of Confirmation

*After completing all the test pages review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
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1. What 2 other words does the Hebrew word for spirit mean? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did the Spirit guide the chosen people throughout their history? \_\_\_\_\_
3. The Spirit that was present at creation was different than the Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
4. At Pentecost the Spirit arrived as a beautiful rainbow. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
5. According to *Acts* 1:8 what will we be after the Spirit comes upon us? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation because it strengthens what takes place in Baptism  
\_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
7. When the apostles laid their hands on people they received \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The gifts of the holy Spirit that we receive are only for our own good. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
9. Give an example of how a seal is used in ordinary life: \_\_\_\_\_.
10. What does the seal of Confirmation remind us of? \_\_\_\_\_.
11. To confirm means to \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Anyone can confirm. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
13. If a priest confirms, why does he use oil blessed by the bishop? \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Who can be confirmed? \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Name 2 things that oil does in ordinary life: \_\_\_\_\_
16. What is every follower of Christ called to spread? \_\_\_\_\_.
17. During Baptism the candidates are asked to reject \_\_\_\_\_ and to accept everything that is in the \_\_\_\_\_.
18. List the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
19. What does the bishop use when he makes the sign of the cross on the foreheads of those who are being confirmed? \_\_\_\_\_.
20. What words does the bishop use to confirm? \_\_\_\_\_.



## REVIEW TEST

### Sacrament of the Eucharist

*After completing all test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
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1. When did Jesus establish the sacrament of the Eucharist?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who can consecrate the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What words does the priest use to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. After the consecration, do the bread and wine change in their appearance? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No
5. Which does the Catholic Church teach: (*check one*)  
\_\_\_ a) the consecrated bread and wine only *stand for* the body and blood of Christ  
\_\_\_ b) the consecrated bread and wine *really are* the body and blood of Christ
6. How long must you fast before receiving Communion? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What must you be “free of” before receiving Communion? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Outside of the Mass, where is the consecrated bread kept? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Besides those at Mass, who else can receive Communion? \_\_\_\_\_
10. According to *I Corinthians* 11:26 what do we proclaim when we eat the bread and drink the cup?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. The Mass is the renewal of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the cross.
12. What does the word *eucharist* mean? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Give 3 other names for the Eucharist: \_\_\_\_\_
14. When the early Christians worshipped in underground cemeteries, what did they sometimes use for an altar? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Name 3 pieces of clothing the priest wears at Mass: \_\_\_\_\_
16. What does the burning candle or lamp near the tabernacle mean?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. Does the Mass have to be celebrated in a Church building? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No
18. During the Eucharist the priest and people relive the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ.
19. Passages from the Old Testament are never read during Mass. \_\_\_True or \_\_\_False
20. What did the early Christians call the Mass or Eucharist? \_\_\_\_\_



## REVIEW TEST

### Sacrament of Reconciliation

*After completing all the test pages review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
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1. God gave us a will so that we could be free to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What is the built-in risk of our free will? \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The truth is, we sin against \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Refusing or neglecting to help others is not a sin. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
5. Some sins are private, others are \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Why does the Church sing "*O happy fault*" at Easter time? \_\_\_\_\_.
7. In his preaching Jesus linked forgiveness and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. When Jesus told people "*Your faith has saved you*" (Luke 7:50) what did he mean?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
9. In God's eyes we always have value and hope. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
10. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is sometimes called \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The Sacrament of Reconciliation cannot take away the sins we commit after Baptism.  
\_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
12. *John* 20:22-23 describes how Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
13. In *2 Corinthians* 5:18 Paul tells us that God has "*given us the ministry of* \_\_\_\_\_."
14. What Old Testament prophet told King David to confess his sins? \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Describe what *contrition* means: \_\_\_\_\_.
16. The Church teaches that there are two kinds of sins \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
17. The Church's guarantee that the priest will never tell anyone what he heard in confession is called:  
\_\_\_\_\_.
18. What three things must be present to make a sin mortal?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
19. Penance means \_\_\_\_\_.
20. Before we confess our sins we must "*examine our conscience.*" This means we must \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.



## REVIEW TEST

### Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

*After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
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1. Jesus taught that sickness is not a punishment from God. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
2. Give a time when Jesus suffered: \_\_\_\_\_
3. The suffering of Jesus was not really part of God's plan to save us. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
4. Which prophet gives us a description of the *suffering servant*? \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Name two kinds of healing : \_\_\_\_\_ .
6. What did Jesus mean when he told people "*your faith has saved you*"?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
7. How does the Church continue Christ's ministry of healing? \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The apostles never anointed with oil. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
9. Who does the anointing in the Sacrament of Anointing? \_\_\_\_\_.
10. How does the Sacrament of Anointing help the sick overcome the feeling of being alone?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
11. Illness can be a time of grace. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
12. When we care for the sick we are caring for Christ. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
13. When the priest sprinkles the sick person with holy water it recalls how \_\_\_\_\_ brings redemption.
14. Forgiveness of sins has nothing to do with the Sacrament of Anointing. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
15. In this sacrament what is in God's Word during the reading from the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_.
16. Laying on of hands is part of the Sacrament of Anointing. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
17. Where does the priest usually anoint the sick person? \_\_\_\_\_ .
18. The sick person is not allowed to receive Communion. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
19. The priest prays that Christ's \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ may be a remedy for the body and soul of the sick person.
20. The priest anoints the sick person in the name of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.



## REVIEW TEST

### Sacrament of Marriage

*After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
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1. According to *Genesis* 1:27-28 who did God create in his image? \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. What does God share through the love he created between husband and wife?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
3. What is the two-fold purpose of marriage? \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What did the prophets compare God's love to? \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When the nation was unfaithful to its covenant with God what did the prophets call it? \_\_\_\_\_.
6. What did Jesus use to describe his own ministry? \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Jesus called himself the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Jesus chose the temple of Jerusalem to begin his public ministry. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
9. What book of the Bible did Jesus quote to defend marriage against divorce? \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The \_\_\_\_\_ of each person is the basis of a true Christian marriage.
11. What is one of the most beautiful passages on love in the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_.
12. According to the Bible the reason we love is because \_\_\_\_\_ .
13. The priest blesses the rings of the bride and groom as signs and reminders of their  
\_\_\_\_\_.
14. In God's plan marriage is meant to be a path to \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Marriage is the only sacrament that is a sign of God's love. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
16. Why does the Church invite bride and groom to exchange their vows during the Eucharist?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
17. With the words \_\_\_\_\_ the bride and groom freely consent to their covenant of love.
18. Handling conflict gives us a chance to work for positive change. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
19. Why does the Church call the family home a "*domestic church*"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
20. Love means caring for another's needs as if they were \_\_\_\_\_.



## REVIEW TEST

### Sacrament of Holy Orders

*After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.  
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1. In the Old Testament God instructed Moses to set aside his brother and his sons to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In the New Testament Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ the old priesthood.
3. What does *1 Peter 2:9* call all the followers of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_.
4. As a *priestly people* all members of Christ's body are called to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When Jesus chose the \_\_\_\_\_ he chose the first priests.
6. Every baptized person belongs to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
7. Since the time of the apostles there were 3 degrees of priestly service: \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Because the priest represents Christ he is above human weakness. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False
9. Bishops share their sacred power with priests and deacons by \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Because ordination makes a lasting \_\_\_\_\_, it can never be repeated.
11. The bishop \_\_\_\_\_ the people in his care.
12. "*In persona Christi*" means \_\_\_\_\_.
13. The unbroken *laying on of hands* from the time of the apostles to the bishops of today is called \_\_\_\_\_.
14. The pope is the successor to \_\_\_\_\_.
15. During the arrest of Jesus what did Peter do? \_\_\_\_\_
16. One of the pope's titles is servant of the \_\_\_\_\_.
17. The Sacrament of Holy Orders has its origin in the many gifts the \_\_\_\_\_ gives the Church.
18. During the ordination of a priest the bishop asks if the candidate has been judged worthy by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
19. The bishop puts \_\_\_\_\_ on the hands of the new priest.
20. The Sacrament of Holy Orders gets its name from the Latin word *ordo* which means \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

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