

Journey of a Woman's Life: Using the Sacraments to Grow in Our Faith



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Our faith journey is celebrated through the rituals of the sacraments of our Church acknowledging our participation and place in the body of Christ. As we mature, we begin to know and appreciate its significance, especially as our parents and godparents help us to understand and keep our faith.

However, we frequently are so grounded in our physical/material lives that we forget that in actuality – we are spiritual beings living a physical life. We are temples of the Holy Spirit and as such our lives should be led focused on how we live our spiritual lives encased within a physical body. In whatever ways we use and care for our bodies – and those of others - it should be with a spiritual intent. It is the Holy Spirit within that makes our bodies and all persons sacred.

With that in mind, this retreat will examine our spiritual lives through the lens of the seven sacraments of our Church. We will use the authority of Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, our Holy Father Pope Francis and our own experiences as resources and we have organized the retreat as the *Catechism* is organized. It states:

1210 Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. There are seven: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life:¹ they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life.

1211 Following this analogy, the first chapter will expound the three sacraments of Christian initiation; the second, the sacraments of healing; and the third, the sacraments at the service of communion and the mission of the faithful. This order, while not the only one possible, does allow one to see that the sacraments form an organic whole in which each particular sacrament has its own vital place. In this organic whole, the Eucharist occupies a unique place as the "Sacrament of sacraments": "all the other sacraments are ordered to it as to their end."²

1 Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III,65,1.

2 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III,65,3.

Next we move on to the definition and understanding of sacraments as expressed in the *Catechism*:

1131 The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.

1133 The Holy Spirit prepares the faithful for the sacraments by the Word of God and the faith which welcomes that word in well-disposed hearts. Thus the sacraments strengthen faith and express it.

Let us listen to Jesus.

Scripture: John 14:15-18

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."

Reflection and discussion:

1. Looking back on your own experience of the sacraments, discuss how they take on new or different significance as a result of this reflection.

Together, Let us pray *The Apostles' Creed.*

**I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.**

THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

1212 The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the *foundations* of every Christian life. "The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity."³

³ Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Divinae consortium naturae*: AAS 63 (1971) 657; cf. RCIA Introduction 1-2.

BAPTISM

When we think of baptism, most of us think of our baptism as infants and the only knowledge we have of the experience is through photographs and the stories of our family members. It is a gift however, to hear adults who have come through the Rite of Christian Initiation speak of their experience of baptism.

Scripture tells us in all four gospels (Mt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1: 9-11, Lk. 3: 21-22 and John 1: 28-34) of Jesus' baptism as an adult by John in the Jordan.

Let us listen with our hearts to the Word of God.



Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" Jesus said to him in reply, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

In a moment we will reflect and discuss, but first let's learn what the *Catechism* says regarding Baptism.

1213 Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua),³ and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."⁴

³ Cf. Council Of Florence: DS 1314: *vitae spiritualis ianua*.

⁴ *Roman Catechism* II,2,5; Cf. Council Of Florence: DS 1314; CIC, cann. 204 § 1; 849; CCEO, can. 675 § 1.

Reflection and discussion:

1. What are your memories of your baptism? Do you know the date and celebrate it? Who were your godparents and did/do you have a life-long relationship with them?
2. At what point in your faith journey did you realize that being baptized also meant being identified as a child of God? How has that knowledge impacted your life?
3. How has your experience of baptism changed over the years – the baptism of your own children? How did you select their godparents? The baptism of a spouse and or your grandchildren? Do you acknowledge and celebrate those baptisms?
4. Maybe you have been chosen as a godparent. How has that sacred trust impacted your relationship with the person and with God?

At this time, let us all process forward, dip our fingers in this blessed holy water and as we cross ourselves with the sign of our salvation – listen with the ears of our hearts to our Holy Spirit say, “This is my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased.”

Consider playing "Come to the Water" by John Foley, S.J. during the procession.

When you return to your seat, you may want to write down a few words or a prayer with regard to your experience and then when you are ready, share with the person next to you.

5. As a result of our reflection and discussion, how is God calling you to change or to do something differently to acknowledge the grace of the Holy Spirit within?

Let's once again listen to what Jesus is saying to us.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20

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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.

6. Some of us may have non-Catholic spouses, or our children may have stepped away from practicing their faith. We may have grandchildren who are in need of baptism – or we may know people in need of baptism – name some ways you might be able to act on this call as a result of the call of your own baptism?



Confirmation



When we think of confirmation, many of us remember being in our teens, waiting for the bishop to come and then being gently slapped by him as an indication that we were now a “soldier of Christ.” It was such a momentous occasion that we chose a new name - a saint’s name to be our model to emulate. We chose a sponsor to mentor us, to vouch for us to the bishop and community.

Scripture: John 6:27

Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.

Now let us listen to what the *Catechism* teaches us about seal of Confirmation.

1285 Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.⁸⁹ For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the

Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.⁹⁰

1293 In treating the rite of Confirmation, it is fitting to consider the sign of anointing and what it signifies and imprints: a spiritual seal.

Anointing, in Biblical and other ancient symbolism, is rich in meaning: oil is a sign of abundance and joy;¹⁰³ it cleanses (anointing before and after a bath) and limbers (the anointing of athletes and wrestlers); oil is a sign of healing, since it is soothing to bruises and wounds;¹⁰⁴ and it makes radiant with beauty, health, and strength.

1296 Christ himself declared that he was marked with his Father's seal.¹⁰⁸ Christians are also marked with a seal: "It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us; he has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."¹⁰⁹ This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial.¹¹⁰

89 Cf. *Roman Ritual*, Rite of Confirmation (OC), Introduction 1.

90 LG 11; Cf. OC, Introduction 2.

103 Cf. *Deut* 11:14; *Pss* 23:5; 104:15.

104 Cf. *Isa* 1:6; *Lk* 10:34.

108 Cf. *Jn* 6:27.

109 *2 Cor* 1:21-22; cf. *Eph* 1:13; 4,30.

110 Cf. *Rev* 7:2-3; 9:4; *Ezek* 9:4-6.

Reflection and discussion:

1. Do you recall your Confirmation? The name you chose and why? What reasons did you have for selecting your sponsor?
2. What did your confirmation mean to you then and how has your understanding changed – through your experiences of life since then, in your study now?
3. If you are a convert, did your confirmation have special significance for you coming from another faith community?
4. Have you been chosen as a sponsor for another receiving confirmation, what has been your experience of that sacred trust?
5. What can you do to encourage others in their call to confirmation?

In our earlier session, our prayer focused upon the grace to live as a child of God that our Holy Spirit gave to us in the waters of baptism. Now we will focus on being sealed with the Holy Spirit. Let us listen to the Word of God as proclaimed from Paul's Letter to the Galatians. As you listen, note the fruits of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-25

For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another.

I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit.

On the tables in front of you, you will notice small containers with just a few drops of blessed oil. We ask you now to turn to the person next to you – take her hands and as the cantor sings, anoint the palms of her hands with the holy oil. When finished, the cantor will sing again so that your hands may also be anointed.

Cantor:

Refrain: The fruit of the Spirit is Jesus' presence within me

May I always reach out to others in **LOVE**
May **JOY** pervade all that I do
That **PEACE** may be in the hearts of all whom I touch.

Refrain: The fruit of the Spirit is Jesus' presence within me

May I express only **PATIENCE** when challenged to wait
May **KINDNESS** be my prevailing response
That all will know the **GENEROSITY** of Our Lord.

Refrain: The fruit of the Spirit is Jesus' presence within me

May my **FAITHFULNESS** express only trust in the Lord.
May my **GENTLENESS** be His most-needed caress
That **SELF-CONTROL** master the flesh and
LOVE of all prevail: .

Refrain: The fruit of the Spirit is Jesus' presence within me

Eucharist



First Holy Communion – three words that evoke images, memories, a pinnacle of life that we then repeat every Sunday marking the unfolding of our ordinary lives and at every momentous occasion of life – at marriage, holy orders, when we are sick and at death. It unites us to Christ, to the body of Christ and it nourishes us for the journey into eternal life. As Our Blessed Mother received Christ into her body, so too do we and with our amen – our yes - commit to bringing Christ to all whom we meet.

Scripture: John 6:53-59

Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. 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." These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

1323 "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.'"¹³⁵

135 SC 47.

1324 The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life."¹³⁶ "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."¹³⁷

136 LG 11.

137 PO 5.

1374 The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend."²⁰¹In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained."²⁰²"This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."²⁰³

201 St. Thomas Aquinas, STh III,73,3c.

202 Council of Trent (1551): DS 1651.

203 Paul VI, MF 39.

1392 What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh "given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit,"²²⁹ preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to us as viaticum.

229 PO 5.

Reflection and discussion

1. What is your first memory of Eucharist? What were the preparations? Recall your feelings – Anticipation? Fear? Joy? Disappointment? Community? Holiness?
2. If you are a convert, what were the circumstances of receiving the Eucharist for the first time? How was it different from what you might have experienced in your previous faith community?
3. Recall memorable communions – your first with your spouse? With your children? As an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion? From the hands of your son - a priest?
4. How has your understanding and your faith changed in time?
5. Do you bring your gratitude, concerns, the call of God in your life, other people who are suffering - to your amen at communion?
6. Mass is celebration of both the liturgy of the Word and liturgy of the Eucharist, do you actively, consciously prepare yourself to listen and hear the Word that God is speaking to you and then at holy communion do you bring that word to your commitment to respond – to your amen?

Conclude with a Eucharistic song eg. *We Are One Body*

THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

1421 The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health,³ has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

3 Cf. Mk 2:1-12.



Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus healing mind, body and spirit: mental illness; physical disability – blindness, paralysis; sickness – leprosy, fever, hemorrhage - even the dead – Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son and Lazarus; and the spiritual healings of shame, fear, greed, lack of faith. Even as he was being arrested, Jesus healed.

Scripture: Luke 22:50-51

And one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said in reply, “Stop, no more of this!” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him.

And on the cross, Jesus healed those who crucified him, the repentant thief crucified with him - each and all of us:

Luke 23: 33-34, 39-43

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. [Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”]...

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” 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.”

Penance/ Reconciliation



Many of us received the sacrament as children when it was called confession. We remember the confessional boxes with their sliding screens that separated the priest so that we could remain anonymous. We were taught to give a list of our sins and how many times we committed them. The emphasis was on confessing our sin and making restitution and/or acts of penitence.

Some of us attended our first reconciliation as a family – it was there that most of our offenses occurred and we learned that it was there that we had to begin to be reconciled – the emphasis was on right relationship.

Today the emphasis is far more on seeking out the root causes of our sins and discerning appropriate means for overcoming them – then through the absolution of the priest and grace of the sacrament – be restored to baptismal dignity within the community.

Scripture: John 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [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."

1422 *"Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion."*⁴

⁴ LG 11 § 2.

1448 *Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that this sacrament has undergone over the centuries, the same fundamental structure is to be discerned. It comprises two equally essential elements: on the one hand, the acts of the man who undergoes conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit: namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction; on the other, God's action through the intervention of the Church. The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion.*

***1460 The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him."*⁶³**

63 Rom 8:17; Rom 3:25; 1 Jn 2:1-2; cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1690.

Reflection and discussion:

1. What are your memories of your first sacrament of reconciliation?
2. Do you have experiences of confession/penance/reconciliation that may need to be healed?
3. Did you experience apology and reconciliation in your family or was it always just more of the same? How have you implemented reconciliation within your own family now that you are the adult?
4. What are the positive and challenging aspects of the sacrament for you?
5. How adept are you at forgiving others? Do you see the peace that forgiveness brings and the division that retention of sins permits?

Journaling is a spiritual process that can be particularly useful in reconciliation. Whatever your thoughts or feelings they are written only for your eyes, they need not be in complete sentences or pretty, whatever you write can be torn up once you've expressed your feelings and have no need for the words any longer. Let us now take 15 minutes to examine our conscience:

- to think of sins we need to confess, relationships we need to reconcile;
- to recall the forgiveness of self and/or others that we have not given or received;
- let's write down three things we can do when we leave today to bring about more of the peace that Jesus offers to each of us.
- Form into a one or two sentences a prayer of what we most need to ask Jesus.

Let us pray together the *Confiteor*.

I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God. Amen.

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Anointing of the Sick



1511 The Church believes and confesses that among the seven sacraments there is one especially intended to strengthen those who are being tried by illness, the Anointing of the Sick:

This sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament. It is alluded to indeed by Mark, but is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James the apostle and brother of the Lord.¹²⁵

125 Council Of Trent (1551): DS 1695; cf. Mk 6:13; Jas 5:14-15.

As mentioned earlier, the healing miracles that Jesus did are myriad; the gospel of John even tells us:

Scripture: John 21:25

There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.

The healing of the woman with hemorrhages Luke 8: 42-48 comes immediately to mind:

... As he went, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years, who [had spent her whole livelihood on doctors and] was unable to be cured by anyone, came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped. Jesus then asked, "Who touched me?" While all were denying it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are pushing and pressing

in upon you." But Jesus said, "Someone has touched me; for I know that power has gone out from me." When the woman realized that she had not escaped notice, she came forward trembling. Falling down before him, she explained in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been healed immediately. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace."

The Catechism states:

1532 The special grace of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its effects:

- **the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church;**
- **the strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;**
- **the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance;**
- **the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul;**
- **the preparation for passing over to eternal life.**

It is in following Jesus' command to do as he did which sends ministers out from Mass to bring Eucharist to the sick. Ministers of the Sick are catechized and commissioned in their roles to bring Christ's healing.

And it is the priest who is sent to anoint with holy oil those who seek the grace of the Holy Spirit before surgery and in times of extreme physical suffering.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Which of Jesus' healing miracles speaks most clearly to you? Why?
2. Have you experienced the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?
3. Share the graces that came to you or others you know as a result of an Anointing.
4. Have you served as a commissioned Minister to the Sick? Please share the graces that came from that experience.
5. As a caregiver how have you experienced the Anointing of a loved one?

Let us now spend a few moments and offer up our prayers for those closest to us who are sick or suffering.

The Sacraments at the Service of Communion

1534 Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.

1535 Through these sacraments those already consecrated by Baptism and Confirmation¹ for the common priesthood of all the faithful can receive particular consecrations. Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are consecrated in Christ's name "to feed the Church by the word and grace of God."² On their part, "Christian spouses are fortified and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament."³

1 Cf. LG 10.

2 LG 11 § 2.

3 GS 48 § 2.

Both the sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony are ordered toward the good of the other. In Holy Orders, “other” refers to all and in Matrimony - “other” refers exclusively to spouse and the fruit of that union which then becomes ordered to the good of all. It is significant to our understanding to know the scriptural basis for our Church to place these two sacraments together. And verses 11 and 12 specifically tell us of the call to Holy Orders.

Scripture: Matthew 19: 1- 15

When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan. Great crowds followed him, and he cured them there.³ Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, '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." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss [her]?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery." [His] disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept [this] word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them,¹⁴ but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." After he placed his hands on them, he went away.

Holy Orders

1536 Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate.

As Catholics, we are proud and honored to be the mothers and sisters of priests and bishops who have answered the call of God to consecrate their lives exclusively in God's Service to all. So too some women are privileged to have responded to the call as the wives of deacons.

To best understand the response to this unique call, one needs also to be aware of the priesthood to which each of us is called through our baptism.



1546 Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church "a kingdom, priests for his God and Father."²⁰ The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are "consecrated to be ...a holy priesthood."²¹

²⁰ Rev 1:6; cf. Rev 5:9-10; 1 Pet 2:5,9.

²¹ LG 10 § 1.

1553 "In the name of the whole church" does not mean that priests are the delegates of the community. The prayer and offering of the church are inseparable from the prayer and offering of Christ, her head; it is always the case that Christ worships in and through his Church. The whole Church, the Body of Christ, prays and offers herself "through him, with him, in him," in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to God the Father. The whole Body, caput et membra, prays and offers itself, therefore those who in the Body are especially his ministers are called ministers not only of Christ, but also of the Church. It is because the ministerial priesthood represents Christ that it can represent the Church.

It is in understanding and embracing our own consecration and therefore participation in the holy priesthood that we can most truly celebrate the total self-

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giving and gift of Holy Orders. It also allows for what Vatican Council II calls our participation in the holy sacrifice of the Mass as “full, conscious and active.”

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Are you the relative of a priest, bishop or deacon? How has that relationship impacted your life?
2. If you have attended an ordination, what touched you most in the liturgy?
3. Have you had the privilege of encouraging a vocation? What support can you give to someone discerning a call?

Let us take a moment now to pray for our Pope, Bishops, Priests, Seminarians and all who are considering a vocation at this time.



MATRIMONY



1601 "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."⁸⁴

84 CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. GS 48 § 1.

Let us listen again to Jesus explain marriage.

Scripture: Matthew 19:4-6

"Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, '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."

1604 God who created man out of love also calls him to love-the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love.⁹⁰ Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: "And God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"⁹¹

90 Cf. Gen 1:27; 1 Jn 4:8, 16.

91 Gen 1:28; cf. 1:31.

Reflection and Discussion: Marriage is a sacrament that in the eyes of the Catholic Church is forever, faithful and fruitful. We are to love each other just as Jesus loved His Church.

1. Share examples of sacramental marriages that you know – your own, parents, friends – what are the qualities that make them sacramental?

1613 On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign - at his mother's request - during a wedding feast.¹⁰⁵ The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the

confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.

105 Cf. Jn 2:1-11.

2. Share the fruits of your marriage—if blessed by children—then about them and possibly grandchildren. If there are no children, how did your marriage serve and bless others?

The sacrament of marriage is conferred by the spouses upon one another and indeed is fulfilled by them in their conjugal union.

1639 The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself.¹⁴³ From their covenant arises "an institution, confirmed by the divine law, . . . even in the eyes of society."¹⁴⁴ The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love."¹⁴⁵

143 Cf. Mk 10:9.

144 GS 48 § 1.

145 GS 48 § 2.

1640 Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom.¹⁴⁶

146 . CIC, can. 1141.

In a sacramental marriage, only death can separate spouses.

3. If your marriage has ended in death of your spouse, share the grief and your recovery from the grief to the special relationship you may have now. If you have not experienced this grief, share the experience and recovery you have witnessed of someone you know.

From a young age, Catholics are taught to pray about and discern their vocations – whether they're called to marriage, to the religious life, to the priesthood, or consecrated single life. In the midst of our discussion of marriage, the *Catechism* presents virginity of consecrated women and men as well as single persons.

1620 Both the sacrament of Matrimony and virginity for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself. It is he who gives them meaning and grants them the grace which is indispensable for living them out in conformity with his will.¹¹⁷ Esteem of virginity for the sake of the kingdom¹¹⁸ and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other:

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Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity. Whoever praises it makes virginity more admirable and resplendent. What appears good only in comparison with evil would not be truly good. The most excellent good is something even better than what is admitted to be good.¹¹⁹

117 Cf. Mt 19:3-12.

118 Cf. LG 42; PC 12; OT 10.

119 St. John Chrysostom, *De virg.* 10,1:PG 48,540; Cf. John Paul II, FC 16.

1658 We must also remember the great number of single persons who, because of the particular circumstances in which they have to live - often not of their choosing - are especially close to Jesus' heart and therefore deserve the special affection and active solicitude of the Church, especially of pastors. Many remain without a human family often due to conditions of poverty. Some live their situation in the spirit of the Beatitudes, serving God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. The doors of homes, the "domestic churches," and of the great family which is the Church must be open to all of them. "No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who 'labor and are heavy laden.'"¹⁷²

172 FC 85; cf. Mt 11:28.

While religious life and priesthood automatically find familial relationships in community, the single vocation must establish community and has a variety of stages. We are all single at some point in our lives. Being single doesn't mean that you are lonely. Being single can be and is a gift, just as being married is a gift. One can be married but still feel alone. Our vocations are what we make of them and put into them. We need to keep our lives centered on God and doing the good works that we are called to do. When we do these things in our home, parish and community we are filled with hope, love, faith, and generosity.

Reflection and Discussion:

4. If you are single, how do you live out your vocation? Is it challenging being single?
5. As a result of today's reflection and discussion, are you better equipped to explain the vocation of marriage to those who may not have an understanding of its sacramentality? Can you think of those who may be blessed and uplifted by knowing what you have heard today?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we come to you as women with a vocation. Whether that vocation is the religious life, married life or single life, we ask that you send the Holy Spirit among us so that we can have the courage necessary to enter into remain committed to the vocation desired by you. All of this is done in Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclusion

As Catholics, our lives are framed and formed by the sacraments of our faith. They confer the sacredness of this life and prepare us for life to come.

1127 Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify.⁴⁸ They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son's Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power.

48 Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1605; DS 1606.

V. THE SACRAMENTS OF ETERNAL LIFE

1130 The Church celebrates the mystery of her Lord "until he comes," when God will be "everything to everyone."⁵³ Since the apostolic age the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit's groaning in the Church: Marana tha!⁵⁴ The liturgy thus shares in Jesus' desire: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you . . . until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."⁵⁵ In the sacraments of Christ the Church already receives the guarantee of her inheritance and even now shares in everlasting life, while "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus."⁵⁶ The "Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come . . . Come, Lord Jesus!'"⁵⁷

St. Thomas sums up the various aspects of sacramental signs:

"Therefore a sacrament is a sign that commemorates what precedes it - Christ's Passion; demonstrates what is accomplished in us through Christ's Passion - grace; and prefigures what that Passion pledges to us - future glory."⁵⁸

53 1 Cor 11:26; 15:28.

54 1 Cor 16:22.

55 Lk 22:15.

56 Titus 2:13.

57 Rev 22:17, 20.

58 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III,60,3.

Following is a teaching on the sacraments that Pope Francis gave at General Audience on November 6, 2013. You are encouraged to read this resource - so beautifully expressed. At the conclusion, he asked the community to please join him in praying a *Hail Mary* for a one and a half year old girl he had visited. Let us conclude our time together in praying a *Hail Mary* for all little girls and for little boys as well - no matter what age as they journey through this life. May the sacramentality of our lives and love be inspiration and motivation for them to become all that God intends for them to be.

Our Lady of Good Counsel, please pray for us. Amen.

POPE FRANCIS
GENERAL AUDIENCE
Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 6 November 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Last Wednesday I spoke about the communion of saints, understood as a communion among holy people, that is among us believers. Today I would like to go in depth into the other aspect of this reality: you will remember that there were two aspects: one is communion, unity, among us, and the other aspect is communion in holy things, in spiritual goods. These two aspects are closely connected; in fact, communion among Christians grows through the sharing of spiritual goods. In particular we will consider: the Sacraments, charisms and charity (cf. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, nn. 949-953). We grow in unity, in communion, through: the Sacraments, the charisms given to each of us by the Holy Spirit, and charity.

First of all, the communion of the Sacraments. The Sacraments express and realize an effective and profound communion among us, for in them we encounter Christ the Saviour and, through him, our brothers and sisters in faith. The Sacraments are not mere appearances, they are not rituals; they are the power of Christ; Jesus Christ is present in the Sacraments. When we celebrate the Eucharist it is the living Jesus who brings us together, forms us into a community, allows us to adore the Father. Each one of us, in fact, through Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, is incorporated into Christ and united to the entire community of believers. Therefore, if on the one hand it is the Church that "makes" the Sacraments, on the other, it is the Sacraments that "make" the Church, that build her up, by generating new children, by gathering them into the holy people of God, by strengthening their membership.

Every encounter with Christ, who in the Sacraments gives us salvation, invites us to "go" and communicate to others the salvation that we have been able to see, to touch, to encounter and to receive, and which is truly credible because it is love. In this way, the Sacraments spur us to be missionaries, and the Apostolic commitment to carry the Gospel into every setting, including those most hostile, is the most authentic fruit of an assiduous sacramental life, since it is a participation in the saving initiative of God, who desires salvation for all people. The grace of the Sacraments nourishes in us a strong and joyful faith, a faith that knows how to stand in wonder before the "marvels" of God and how to resist the idols of the world. That is why it is important to take Communion, it is important that children be baptized early, that they be confirmed, because the Sacraments are the presence of Jesus Christ in us, a presence that helps us. It is important, when we feel the weight of our sin to approach the Sacrament of

Reconciliation. Someone might say: "But I am afraid that the priest will chastise me". No, the priest will not chastise you. Do you know who you will encounter in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? You will encounter Jesus who pardons you! Jesus is waiting for you there; and this is a Sacrament that makes the whole Church grow.

A second aspect of communion in holy things is the communion of charisms. The Holy Spirit distributes to the faithful a multitude of spiritual gifts and graces; the "imaginative" wealth, let us say, of gifts of the Holy Spirit is ordered to building up the Church. The charisms — that word is a little difficult — are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us, talents, possibilities.... Gifts given not to be hidden but to be shared with others. They are not given for the benefit of the one who receives them, but for the use of the People of God. If a charism, one of these gifts, serves instead as self-affirmation, then it is doubtful that we are dealing with an authentic charism or one faithfully lived out. The charisms are special graces, given to some for the good of many others. They are attitudes, inspirations and interior promptings that are born in the consciences and experiences of certain people, who are called to put themselves at the service of the community. In particular, these spiritual gifts further the sanctity of the Church and her mission. We are all called to respect them in ourselves and in others, to receive them as serving the Church's fruitful presence and work. St Paul warns: "Do not quench the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19). Let us not quench the Spirit who gives us these gifts, these abilities, these very beautiful virtues that make the Church grow.

What is our attitude to the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Are we aware that the Spirit of God is free to give them to whomsoever he wishes? Do we consider them as a spiritual help, through which the Lord sustains our faith and reinforces our mission in the world?

And we come to the third aspect of communion in holy things, that is, communion in charity, the unity among us that creates charity, love. The gentiles, observing the early Christians, said: how they love each other, how they wish one another well! They do not hate, they do not speak against one another. This is the charity, the love of God that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts. The charisms are important in the life of the Christian community, but they are always a means for growth in charity, in love, which St Paul sets above the charisms (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13). Without love, in fact, even the most extraordinary gifts are in vain; this man heals people, he has that power, this other virtue... but does he have love and charity in his heart? If he does then all is well, but if he does not he is no servant of the Church. Without love no gift or charism could serve the Church, for where there is not love there is an emptiness that becomes filled with selfishness. And I ask myself: if we all were egotistical, could we live in communion and peace? No, it's not possible, that is why it is necessary that love unite us. Our smallest gesture of love benefits everyone!

