

Sacramental Experiences

- ✦ Sacramental imagination recognizes that grace is mediated. God distributes his grace to humanity through physical matter; God manifests his relationship with us through our senses.
- ✦ The most dramatic example of this is the Incarnation. God loves us so much that he wanted to be right there with us.
- ✦ While the Incarnation is the most important example of sacramentality, there are many ways that we can come to understand God through his creation.

Sacrament
“A visible sign of an invisible reality.” St. Augustine of Hippo

The Basic Sacraments

These sacraments have been recognized by many theologians since the Second Vatican Council, which took place from 1962-1965.

Jesus—The Primordial Sacrament

“He is the image of the invisible God.”

[Jesus] “has now reconciled in his fleshy body through his death, to present you holy...before him.”

Colossians 1:15, 22, New American Bible

The Church—A Basic Sacrament

The Church is the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13, Col. 1:24), a continuation of the sacramental nature of Jesus. We experience the sacramentality of Jesus through the Church. The Church conveys Scripture and Tradition, including the Tridentine sacraments, to each generation.

“By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind.”

Lumen gentium # 1, Vatican II

The visible Church on earth is sacramental, but the invisible church in heaven and in purgatory is not.

Without these basic sacraments, the seven sacraments would only be sacramentals. Without Jesus and the Church giving them meaning, they would only be reminders of God at best.

The Seven Sacraments

These Tridentine sacraments were officially defined at the Council of Trent in the 16th century.

“A Sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ to give Grace.” The Baltimore Catechism

Baptism

In Water

[By Desire—Catechumens]

[By Blood—Martyrdom]

Confirmation

Eucharist

inc. Viaticum (a special case for the dying)

Reconciliation

Public Confession (no longer used)

Private Confession

Communal Penance Service

General Absolution

Anointing of the Sick

Matrimony

Holy Orders

Deacon

Priest

Bishop

The above brackets indicate items that are not sacraments, but, these can sometimes take the place of the baptism if absolutely necessary. Compare to *Anonymous Christian* (CCC 1258-1260).

Sacramentals

Holy objects or acts; officially defined *lesser sacraments*; objects blessed by the Church.

- Where as the seven sacraments cause grace through the rites themselves, sacramentals cause grace through the devotion of those using or receiving the sacramental. (Richard McBrien, Catholicism, 800).

- Sacraments always involve some sense of community but one can appreciate some sacramentals alone.

- Sacraments always involve actions but some sacramentals are merely objects.

Examples:

Holy Water

Rosaries

Scapulars

Holy Oils

Blessed Ashes

Blessed Palms

Crucifixes

Candles

Icons

Lectionary

Religious Vows

Baptism of Desire

Baptism by Blood

The Word Proclaimed

Prayers/Blessings

Religious Statues

Religious Medals

Etc.

While proper sacramentals are officially defined by the Roman Curia (CCC 1677), by extension of the principle, any object or act that reminds one of God can, in effect, be a sacramental (CCC 1674-1676).

Sacraments

The Seven (Tridentine) Sacraments Ordinary Minister

Extraordinary Minister

Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism

Bishop, Priest, Deacon

Anyone Willing

Can be received only once and is required for reception of the other sacraments. Candidates for baptism, called catechumens, either choose the sacrament for themselves when of the age of reason, or the sacrament is chosen for them earlier by their parents. One or two godparents are chosen as witnesses of the baptism; they will serve as role models and perhaps companions for the journey toward the sacrament.

Confirmation (Chrismation)

Bishop

Priest

Can be received only once and, in the West, at the age of reason or beyond. In the West, confirmation is given to converts before first Communion but to Catholic children/teens after first Communion. As with baptism, a sponsor is chosen.

Eucharist (Communion) Comes in two forms based on bread (host) and wine (cup). After receiving their first communion (at the age of reason or above in the West), Catholics hopefully receive frequently (every Sunday, or even every day), but if not, at least once a year at Easter time. Those in the state of mortal sin, excommunication, or otherwise not in good standing with the Church are asked to refrain. Altar servers commonly assist at Mass.

Eucharistic Consecration

Bishop, Priest

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Communion/Viaticum¹ Distribution

Bishop, Priest, Deacon

Eucharistic Minister

Sacraments of Healing

Reconciliation (Penance, Confession) Baptized Christians may receive reconciliation as needed, but at least once a year after reaching the age of reason and if in the state of mortal sin. Some places practice a First Confession ceremony while others simply allow Christians to begin participating as they are ready.

Private Confession

Bishop, Priest

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Communal Penance Service

Bishop, Priest

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General Absolution²

Bishop, Priest

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Anointing of the Sick¹

Bishop, Priest

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The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick may be received more than once but should not be received frequently, being reserved for the sick, the injured, the dying, and those risking death. Illness, however, does not have to be physical; it can be mental, emotional, spiritual, etc. as well.

Sacraments of Vocation

Matrimony (Marriage)

The Couple Marries Themselves

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This sacrament may be received more than once, but one may have only one spouse at a time. The priest, deacon, or bishop officiating is the presider of the ceremony, but is not a sacramental minister here, just an official witness. Other official witnesses must be present as well.

Holy Orders (Orders, Ordination) This sacrament exists in three forms and may only be received sequentially. Transitional deacons intend to become priests, while permanent deacons do not. Permanent deacons may take their vows while married and be married deacons, but may not marry after holy orders; transitional deacons, priests, and bishops are normally celibate in the West. These are the only three levels of the sacrament of holy orders; "monsignors" are priests; "archbishops," and "popes" are bishops; and cardinals, those who will elect the next pope, are normally bishops.

Deaconate (Deacon)

Bishop

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Presbyterate (Priest)

Bishop

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Episcopate (Bishop)

Bishop

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¹ In the Tridentine period the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick was called "Extreme Unction," given when death was expected. Today "Last Rites" and "Anointing of the Sick" are different, though they may still coincide. Viaticum is the defining component of last rights; it is Eucharist as food for the journey. "Anointing" or "unction" is the defining component of anointing of the sick.

² This form of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is for emergencies only. When the emergency has passed, one must seek one-on-one Confession, in Private Confession or in a Communal Penance Service, for any mortal sins confessed during General Absolution.