

# The Sacraments

Source of Our Life in Christ



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## THE SACRAMENTS: Source of Our Life in Christ

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

x	<b>Abbreviations used for the Books of the Bible</b>
x	<b>Abbreviations used for Documents of the Magisterium</b>
xi	<b>Foreward</b>
xii	<b>Introduction</b>
238	<b>Art and Photo Credits</b>
242	<b>Index</b>



*The Crucifixion by Bernardo Daddi, ca. 1340*

1	<b>Introduction</b>
2	Introduction
3	The Role of Grace in Salvation History
4	Adam and Eve and the First Sin
5	God Continues to Lead Humanity Back to Him
5	<i>Sidebar:</i> God Made Three Promises to Abraham
6	Mary's "Yes" to God's Plan of Salvation
7	Christ Found the Church as an Instrument of Grace
7	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Church Continues the Saving Actions of Christ
8	Sacraments: Transforming Actions of Christ
9	Sacraments as Signs
9	<i>Sidebar:</i> Material Signs Used in the Sacraments
10	Sacraments as Efficacious Signs
11	Sacraments as Actions of Jesus Christ
11	<i>Sidebar:</i> St. Francis of Assisi
12	The Necessity of the Sacraments
13	Actual Grace
13	Sanctifying Grace
14	New Creatures in Christ
15	Celebration the Sacraments
15	Matter, Form, and Minister
15	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Sacramentum
16	Receiving the Sacraments with the Proper Disposition
17	Conclusion
18	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church
19	<i>Supplementary Reading:</i> Otto Neururer
20	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>
20	<i>Vocabulary</i>
22	<i>Study Questions</i>
23	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
23	<i>From the Catechism</i>

## THE SACRAMENTS: Source of Our Life in Christ

### TABLE OF CONTENTS



#### 25 **Chapter 1: Baptism**

27	Introduction
27	Prefiguration of Baptism in the Old Testament
29	Jewish Rites of Purification at the Time of Christ
29	St. John the Baptist and the Baptism of Christ
30	Institution of Baptism by Christ
32	Baptism as a Sacrament
33	Effects of Baptism
34	Original Sin and Its Consequences
35	Celebration of Baptism
35	Matter
35	Form
37	Minister
37	Rite of Baptism
37	a. What Name Have You Given to Your Child?
37	b. What Do You Ask of God's Church?
38	c. Godparents and Sponsors
38	d. Ceremony
39	<i>Sidebar: Baptismal Ceremony in the Eastern Churches</i>
40	Baptism and Christian Vocation
40	Baptism as a Sacrament of Faith
41	Who Can Receive Baptism?
42	Necessity of Baptism
42	Conclusion
43	<i>Supplementary Reading: St. Francis Xavier</i>
44	<i>Supplementary Reading: A Brief History of Christian Initiation</i>
45	<i>Vocabulary</i>
47	<i>Study Questions</i>
48	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
49	<i>From the Catechism</i>

#### 51 **Chapter 2: Confirmation**

52	Introduction
53	Jesus the "Christ"
54	The Promised Spirit
55	The Laying On of Hands and the Anointing of the Holy Spirit
56	The Sacrament of Confirmation
57	<i>Sidebar: Effects of Confirmation</i>
58	The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit
58	1. Wisdom
58	2. Understanding
59	3. Counsel
59	4. Fortitude
59	5. Knowledge
59	6. Piety
60	7. Fear of the Lord
60	Act of Contrition
61	Celebration of Confirmation
61	Matter
61	Form
61	Minister
62	Confirmation Sponsor
62	Confirmation Name
62	Ceremony
63	Living in the Footsteps of Christ
64	Preparation for Confirmation
65	Living Out the Sacrament of Confirmation
65	<i>Sidebar: The Pope Speaks</i>
66	Conclusion
67	<i>Supplementary Reading: St. Therese of Lisieux</i>
68	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>
69	<i>Vocabulary</i>
70	<i>Study Questions</i>
71	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
72	<i>From the Catechism</i>

## THE SACRAMENTS: Source of Our Life in Christ

### TABLE OF CONTENTS



73	<b>Chapter 3: The Eucharist</b>	105	<b>Chapter 4: Reconciliation</b>
74	Introduction	106	Introduction
75	The Institution of the Eucharist	107	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Parable of the Prodigal Son
78	The Promise of the Eucharist: The Bread From Heaven Discourse	108	The Origins of Reconciliation in Salvation History
79	The Real Presence	108	The First Sin
81	Names of the Eucharist	109	The Forgiveness of Sin
82	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Miracle of Lanciano	109	The Institution of the Sacrament
83	The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass	111	Handed Down By the Apostles
84	Sacrifices in the Old Covenant	111	The History of the Sacrament of Penance
85	The New Covenant Sacrifice	111	Reconciliation in the Early Church (AD 50-400)
86	The Celebration of the Mass in the Early Church	112	Reconciliation in the Irish and British Church (AD 400-700)
86	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Holy Chalice of Valencia	113	<i>Sidebar:</i> Indulgences
87	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Celebration of the Eucharist by St. Justin Martyr	114	Morality and Responsibility
88	The Liturgy of the Mass	115	What is Sin?
88	The Liturgy of the Word	115	Sin is any act, word, or desire that violates eternal law.
90	The Liturgy of the Eucharist	115	Sin is a violation of moral law.
92	<i>Sidebar:</i> Byzantine Rite Liturgy of the Eucharist	115	Sin is a disordered love of creatures over God.
93	Participation in the Mass	116	Sin Damages Our Relationship with God
93	Internal Preparation	117	Mortal and Venial Sins
94	The Mass: External Participation	118	How to Make a Good Confession
94	Devotions Outside of Mass	119	<i>Sidebar:</i> Short Examination of Conscience
95	The Ministerial Priesthood	121	The Minister of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
96	A Source of Unity in Christ	121	Importance of the Sacrament
97	Fruits of Regular Reception of the Eucharist	122	Penance in the Life of a Christian
98	Conclusion	123	Conclusion
99	<i>Supplementary Reading:</i> Pope St. Pius X	124	<i>Supplementary Reading:</i> St. John Nepomucene
100	<i>Vocabulary</i>	125	<i>Vocabulary</i>
102	<i>Study Questions</i>	127	<i>Study Questions</i>
103	<i>Practical Exercises</i>	128	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
103	<i>From the Catechism</i>	129	<i>From the Catechism</i>

## THE SACRAMENTS: Source of Our Life in Christ

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

131 **Chapter 5: Anointing of the Sick**

- 132 Introduction
- 134 The Ministry of Healing
- 135 *Sidebar: Lourdes*
- 136 Encounters with Christ
- 138 The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick
- 139 Celebration of the Sacrament
  - 139 Matter
  - 139 Form
  - 140 Minister
- 140 The Effects of the Anointing of the Sick
- 141 When Should the Sacrament be Administered?
- 142 The Meaning of Human Suffering
- 142 The Christian Vocation to Serve Those in Need
- 143 *Sidebar: Bl. Teresa of Calcutta*
- 144 Message of a Cardinal
- 144 Conclusion
- 145 *Supplementary Reading: A Saint Who Killed*
- 146 *Vocabulary*
- 146 *Study Questions*
- 147 *Practical Exercises*
- 148 *From the Catechism*

149 **Chapter 6: Holy Orders**

- 150 Introduction
- 152 The Priesthood in the Old Testament
- 152 The Call of the Apostles
- 154 The Apostolic Church: Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons
- 154 The Role of a Priest: *In Persona Christi*
- 156 The Post-Apostolic Church
- 158 The Sacrament of Holy Orders
- 160 Deacons
  - 161 *Sidebar: Symbols of a Deacon*
- 162 Priests
  - 163 *Sidebar: Symbols of a Priest*
- 164 Bishops: The Fullness of the Priesthood
- 165 *Sidebar: Symbols of a Bishop*
- 166 The Celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders
  - 166 Matter
  - 166 Form
  - 166 Minister
- 167 The Priestly Life
- 168 Religious Life
- 168 Celibacy
- 169 Male Priesthood
- 170 Conclusion
- 171 *Supplementary Reading: Pope John Paul II*
- 172 *Vocabulary*
- 173 *Study Questions*
- 174 *Practical Exercises*
- 175 *From the Catechism*
- 177 *Sidebar: The Popes*



## THE SACRAMENTS: Source of Our Life in Christ

### TABLE OF CONTENTS



#### 179 **Chapter 7: Matrimony**

- 180 Introduction
- 181 The Original Meaning of Marriage
- 183 The Sacrament of Matrimony
- 184 Marital Love
- 185 The Unitive Aspect of Marital Love
- 186 The Procreative Aspect of Marital Love
- 187 Natural Family Planning
- 188 Celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony
- 189 Requirements for Marriage
- 190 *Sidebar: Requirements for Marriage*
- 191 Marriages to Non-Catholics
- 191 Celebrating the Sacrament
  - 191 Matter
  - 192 Form
  - 192 Minister
- 193 The Wedding Ceremony
- 194 The Vocation to Marriage and the Universal Call to Holiness
- 195 The Domestic Church
- 196 Sins Against Marriage
- 197 What is an Annulment?
- 198 Conclusion
- 199 *Supplementary Reading*
- 201 *Supplementary Reading: Georges and Pauline Vanier*
- 202 *Vocabulary*
- 204 *Study Questions*
- 205 *Practical Exercises*
- 206 *From the Catechism*

#### 207 **Chapter 8: Liturgy: The Church at Worship and Prayer**

- 208 Introduction
- 210 Origins of the Liturgy
- 211 *Sidebar: Eastern Rite Iconostasis*
- 212 Actions of Jesus Christ
- 213 The Lord's Day
- 214 Where We Worship
- 215 *Sidebar: Typical Parish Church*
- 216 How We Pray and Worship
- 217 *Sidebar: The Sign of the Cross*
- 219 The Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours)
- 219 *Sidebar: The Liturgy of the Hours*
- 220 *Sidebar: Liturgical Vestments; Sacred Vessels Used in the Liturgy*
- 221 *Sidebar: Liturgical Seasons; Liturgical Colors*
- 222 Sacramentals
  - 223 Holy water
  - 223 Statues, Icons, and Other Holy Images
  - 224 The Rosary
- 225 *Sidebar: The Holy Rosary*
- 226 Stations of the Cross
- 227 Relics and Their Veneration
- 228 Medals and Scapulars
- 229 Pilgrimages, Processions, and Visits to Sacred Places
- 230 *Sidebar: Santiago de Compostela*
- 231 Using Sacramentals at Home
- 231 Conclusion
- 232 *Supplementary Reading: St. Justin Martyr*
- 233 *Vocabulary*
- 235 *Study Questions*
- 236 *Practical Exercises*
- 236 *From the Catechism*



# The Sacraments

## CHAPTER 1



# Baptism

*Through the Sacrament of Baptism, a person is cleansed of all sin, both original and actual, becomes a member of the Body of Christ, and receives the grace needed to enter Heaven.*



## THE SACRAMENTS: Source of Our Life in Christ

# The Sacraments

## CHAPTER 1

# Baptism

After the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, the Apostles were hesitant and unsure about how to proceed with the mission that Christ had given them. It was at Pentecost that Jesus fulfilled his promise of sending the Holy Spirit who inspired them to begin the work of the Church. Leaving the upper room where they had been hiding in fear, the Apostles went out into the streets to announce the Good News. St. Peter, speaking for the twelve, addressed the crowds, saying:

**Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. (Acts 2: 38-39)**

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves . . . to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”<sup>1</sup>

The story of Pentecost gives us a clear description of how the Sacraments of Initiation were celebrated in the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem. Beginning on the day of Pentecost, the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist have always laid the foundation of the Christian life. The faithful are born anew in the Sacrament of Baptism, strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and spiritually nourished by the Holy Eucharist.<sup>2</sup>

Just as it was in the early Church, the Sacrament of Baptism is the first Sacrament we receive, ushering us into the Church and new life in Christ. In this chapter we will look at the origins of the practice of Baptism, the theology behind the Sacrament, and the way it is practiced in the Catholic Church.

### IN THIS CHAPTER, WE WILL ADDRESS SEVERAL QUESTIONS:

- ✠ What is the Sacrament of Baptism?
- ✠ Why is it necessary?
- ✠ What is the meaning of Baptism in the life of a Christian?
- ✠ How is Baptism celebrated?
- ✠ What is the role of parents and godparents in the Baptism of a child?
- ✠ What does the Church teach about those who have not received Baptism?



## BAPTISM

## INTRODUCTION

**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born anew." (Jn 3: 5-7)**

When the Pharisee Nicodemus secretly came to see Jesus at night he was confused and surprised by what he heard. No one can enter the kingdom of God, Jesus told him, without being "born anew." Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus meant by being "born anew," which seemed to imply that we must be reborn to have hope of eternal life with God.

A person is first born from his or her mother's womb. This birth, common to all human beings, gives biological life to the individual and membership in the human community. However, Jesus was speaking about a different kind of birth, a birth through the water of Baptism, by which the Holy Spirit gives supernatural life and membership in the family of God.

Baptism is the doorway into the life of Christ and his Mystical Body, the Church. Through Baptism, the individual receives membership in the Church and access to the other sacraments, in particular the Eucharist and Confirmation. Therefore, Baptism is seen as the basis and foundation of the Christian life.



*The Great Flood* by Bonaventura Peeters. In the Old Testament, there are many examples in which events connected to water prefigure the Sacrament of Baptism.

## PREFIGURATION OF BAPTISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Easter Vigil liturgy, the Church reminds us that "water" has long held an important role in the history of salvation as a symbol of the creative power of God and of purification. The first reading at Easter Vigil from the Book of Genesis describes how, at the dawn of Creation, the Spirit breathed on the waters, making them a wellspring of holiness.

Water is a source of life and fruitfulness on earth. Because of its vitality to human life, it has also been at the center of religious expression and has played a particularly central role in some of the most significant events recorded in Sacred Scripture.

In the Old Testament, there are many examples in which events connected to water prefigure the Sacrament of Baptism. In particular, we see Baptism prefigured in the story of Noah and the flood; in the crossing of the Red Sea; and in the crossing of the River Jordan when the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land.

During the time of Noah, Sacred Scripture tells us that humanity was wicked and evil, and that God decided to purge the world of this wickedness by sending a great flood. However, he decided to spare one righteous

## THE SACRAMENTS: Source of Our Life in Christ

man, Noah, and his family. He instructed Noah to build an ark, which would save him and his family from the waters of the flood.

In the story of Noah, water is the means by which God brings about a cleansing of the earth. As in Baptism, the sins of the world are washed away by water. Additionally, one can also see in the image of the ark a “type” for the Church. While the waters raged around them, Noah and his family were safe within the walls of the ark.

In his first epistle, St. Peter draws the connection between the meaning of the story of Noah and the Sacrament of Baptism.

**God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Pt 3: 20-21)**

Similarly, in the story of the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, we can see how God's Chosen People were saved by water. Having endured generations of slavery, God sent Moses to lead his Chosen People out of captivity. However, this could only be accomplished after God had sent plagues upon Egypt, which initially prompted Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave.



*Moses Drawing Water From The Rock* by Tintoretto.  
“They drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them,  
and the Rock was Christ.” (1 Cor 10: 4)

However, once the Israelites left their captivity, Pharaoh changed his mind, and sent his armies to track down the Israelites and slaughter them. Surrounded and facing certain annihilation, the Israelites escaped when God parted the Red Sea. Once they had safely crossed, the waters closed in on the pursuing Egyptian forces.

In this episode from the Book of Exodus, we can see a prefiguration of Baptism. Those who pass through the waters of Baptism are freed from the slavery of sin, while their former lives and habits are washed away. St. Paul refers to this event when speaking to the Corinthians about Baptism and the Eucharist.

**I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.**

**(1 Cor 10:1-4)**

After forty years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and entered into the land, which had been promised to them by God. This event again prefigures Baptism, which is understood as the beginning of a Christian's journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we saw in the previous chapter, God uses the materials of the physical world to reveal