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# Chapter 23

## Sacraments: Celebrating Christ's Presence

### Preparing for the Chapter

#### Background for the Teacher

##### Signs of Change

In many places, police and fire departments use Catholic priests as chaplains. *Chaplain* is no mere honorary title. In addition to his care and concern for the men and women who serve and protect us, the chaplain can also be called at any time to assist at an accident or rescue. The chaplain answers the call at any hour of the day or night to offer the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick to the injured or the last rites of the Church to the dying.

For God loved  
the world so much that  
he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who  
believes in him may  
not die but have eternal  
life.

—John 3:16

As Catholics we hope to die with the sacraments. For now we are privileged to live with them and from them. All through our lives, the sacraments have been signs of God's love for us. We hear stories of our baptismal day and why our name was chosen. We remember First Holy Communion and Confirmation. We receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, rejoice in forgiveness, and somehow find it a little easier to forgive others. At an ordination, we rejoice in the new priestly life that will bring new life to so many others. We look back on a wedding, and then more Baptisms. More candles, more white gowns, more water, more blessings, more graces—this is our Catholic life.

And, of course, the Eucharist—probably the most extraordinary yet most ordinary of sacraments. What could be more ordinary than taking and eating a piece of bread? But not just bread, of course—the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, who himself rejoiced in ordinary things and based his parables on them: seeds, coins, wheat, even house burglars.

The sacraments have been our road to God. Looking back down this road, what do we see in ourselves? Maybe we have become like baptismal water (refreshment poured out into the lives of others), like bread (broken into bits and pieces, given to others to help them grow), like wine (the wine of healing and joy for others). Yes, maybe we have changed. Maybe we have become a little bit more like Jesus.

**Catechism references: 1113–1134 (the Paschal Mystery in the Church's sacraments), 1667–1679 (sacramentals)**

## Teacher's Prayer

Lord, thank you for the gift of the sacraments. From the time of my Baptism, I have been blessed with the gift of being called your child and a member of your Church. In Penitence and Reconciliation, I am again and again enriched with your grace and brought into a strengthened relationship with you. Through the gift of the Eucharist, I partake of your Body and Blood and am transformed and brought into closer union with you. Through the sacraments, help me grow in my life of Christian discipleship. Amen.

## Teacher's Reflection

How do I see the sacraments as moments of celebration in my life?

## Background Reading

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, chapter 23
- CCC, numbers 1113–1134 (the Paschal Mystery in the Church's sacraments), 1667–1679 (sacramentals)

## Overview

In this chapter the students will learn about the Seven Sacraments and the way they are grouped into three categories: the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, the Sacraments of Healing, and the Sacraments at the Service of Communion. They will learn that through the sacraments, we encounter God, and that through the work of the Holy Spirit, the ordinary works of the Church become the presence of God in the world.

## Learning Goals

Enable the students to

- learn that in the sacraments, we come face-to-face with God and encounter his grace in tangible ways
- understand that the sacraments express God's complete love for us
- recognize that through the sacraments, the gift of God's grace transforms us

## Preparing for the Activities

### Materials

"Media Connections" (optional)

- the DVD *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who* (2008, 88 minutes, rated A-I and G)
- the DVD *Close Encounters with the Sacraments* (12 minutes, Oblate Media & Communication)



## Opening with Prayer

1. **Invite** the students to gather in the prayer corner. Direct them to quiet themselves for prayer.
2. **Light** a candle, make the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."
3. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud John 3:16 from page 262 in the handbook.
4. **Pray** the following:
  - ▶ Lord, open our hearts and minds to your presence always, especially in the sacraments, through which you share with us your grace. Amen.**Close** with the Sign of the Cross.



## Preview Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 23A, "Preparing for Important Events."
2. **Read aloud** the introduction and the directions. Invite the students to complete the chart about preparing for important events in their lives.
3. **Call on** volunteers to share their responses.
4. **Direct** the students to complete the remaining part of the activity. Engage the students in a discussion in preparation for this activity. Lead them to identify such events as celebrating their First Holy Communion, celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, attending Mass, or receiving the Eucharist. The students might also identify retreats or faith events in which they have participated.
5. **Call on** volunteers to share their responses. **Emphasize** that to fully appreciate and benefit from milestones in our faith formation, we must prepare for them fully and be aware of God's action in our lives.

## Introducing Chapter 23

1. **Have** the students turn to page 254 in their handbooks. Tell them that in this chapter, they will learn how in the sacraments, we encounter God's grace in tangible ways.
2. **Call attention** to the Key Words list on page 260. Tell the students to listen for the meaning of these words as they read them in the chapter.
3. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs of chapter 22 on pages 242 and 243.
4. **Call on** volunteers to share some events from their lives that were life-changing milestones.
5. **Call on** a volunteer to read aloud the next three paragraphs, on pages 243 and 244, about the sacraments. **Help** the students review and recall the Seven Sacraments by asking them to identify the three groups of sacraments and then the sacraments that are part of each group. (*Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation; Sacraments of Healing: Penance and Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick; Sacraments at the Service of Communion: Matrimony and Holy Orders*)

## Humanity, Meet Divinity

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud “Humanity, Meet Divinity” on pages 256 and 257.
2. **Emphasize** that in the sacraments, we meet the divine—that is, we encounter God and his saving grace. **Explain** that the sacraments of the Church incorporate many symbols. They also symbolize Christ’s presence and work in our lives. However, the sacraments are more than symbols. Instead they make real God’s presence and action in our lives.

### FYI

#### The Mingling of Water and Wine

During the Preparation of the Gifts, when the priest prepares the water and wine for the Eucharist, he pours a little bit of water into the wine. As he pours he says quietly, “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” This ritual reminds us that the Eucharist unites us with Christ, unites humanity with divinity. As water becomes like wine, so we, at every Eucharist, become more and more like Christ.





## God with Us

1. **Call on** volunteers to read aloud “God with Us” on pages 257 to 259.
2. **Lead** the students in a discussion, asking the following questions:
  - ▶ What is the most visible way in which all people came to fully know that God was with us? (*the birth of Jesus Christ*)
  - ▶ How was God’s power made visible through Jesus’ work? (*in Jesus’ miracles of healing, in Jesus’ forgiveness of sins, and in his Resurrection from the dead*)
  - ▶ How does Christ continue to be present with us today? (*through the Holy Spirit, through whom the ordinary works of the Church become the extraordinary presence of God*)

**Explain** that because God is present in and made visible through the Church, we say that the Church is a sacrament.

- ▶ How does the Church continue Christ’s work? (*Like Jesus, the Church brings people together, forgives sins, and heals and inspires people to continue Christ’s work on earth.*)





## Extending the Lesson

3. **Remind** the students that Jesus' title *Emmanuel* means "God with us."
4. **Ask** a volunteer to read Matthew 1:23.
5. **Explain** that we usually hear this Scripture passage at Christmas. But the theme of "God with us" extends through the entire life of Christ and emerges in a new way at Easter, at his Resurrection. The Eastern Churches link Easter with the Word made flesh and "God with us" when the assembly gathers at the Easter liturgy to hear the Prologue of John's Gospel read in as many languages as possible. This symbolizes the message of Christ reaching around the world.
6. **Ask** a volunteer to read John 1:14, a verse from the Prologue. This verse refers to Christ's birth in the flesh. On Easter in the liturgy of the Eastern Churches, the Prologue is read to celebrate Christ's birth to new life in glory. Yet he still dwells among us, our Emmanuel forever.

## Pray It! Liturgy Connection

1. **Read aloud** the "Pray It! Liturgy Connection" sidebar on page 258.
2. **Explain** that our response to the priest described in the sidebar is called the Memorial Acclamation and that when we pray this response, we express our faith in the mystery of Christ's Resurrection and the new life he won for us.
3. **Encourage** the students to listen at Mass for the celebrant's invitation to the assembly to say the Memorial Acclamation and to join in expressing this prayer.

## Looking Back

1. **Read aloud** the "Looking Back" sidebar on page 259.
2. **Call on** a volunteer to explain in his or her own words the meaning of the word *mystery* as it is used to refer to the sacraments. Emphasize that the word communicates a sense of awe. Our encounter with God's love in the sacraments is so above our ability to comprehend that it leaves us in quiet awe.
3. **Distribute** copies of activity master 23B. Direct the students' attention to the first activity, "Looking Back." Have them silently read and respond to the activity. When everyone has finished, call on volunteers to share one or more of their responses.

## Sacred Mysteries

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud "Sacred Mysteries" on pages 259 and 260.
2. **Draw** a parallel between close and important relationships we have with others and our relationship with God. Emphasize that just as those relationships enrich us emotionally, our relationship with God enriches us spiritually, and our relationship with God is expressed most profoundly in the sacraments, in which we receive God's grace.

3. **Point out** that the word *grace* is frequently associated with the sacraments. Explain that *grace* is the word we use to express the free and undeserved love and gifts we receive from God.
4. **Lead** the students in a discussion. **Ask:**
  - ▶ How is our relationship with God similar to loving relationships we have with family and friends? (Both enrich us with love.)
  - ▶ How does our friendship with God differ from human relationships? (God gives us love and grace freely; God enriches us in ways that are beyond our ability to comprehend.)

## Signs of Grace

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud “Signs of Grace” on pages 261 and 262.
2. **Explain** that the Seven Sacraments will be covered in greater detail in later chapters. By reading the Scripture accounts of Pentecost, when the Apostles were filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the students will understand that Christ instituted the sacraments.
3. **Direct** the students to turn to chapter 2 of Acts of the Apostles in their Bibles. Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:1–4. Help the students understand and reflect on the reading by asking the following questions:
  - ▶ Which sacrament does this Scripture passage describe? (*Confirmation*)
  - ▶ What is the key event described in this passage of Acts? (*the descent of the Holy Spirit*)
  - ▶ How do the events described in this Scripture passage demonstrate the mystery of the sacraments? (*Accept all reasonable answers but lead the students to understand that the powerful events in the story tangibly express God’s power and his grace shared with us in the sacraments.*)
  - ▶ What is one clear way in which the disciples’ encounter with God’s grace changed them when the Holy Spirit came to them? (*They were able to speak in different languages.*)

**Explain** that the Holy Spirit gave the disciples this “gift of tongues” so they could share the Good News with all people.

## Activity

1. **Direct** the students’ attention to the second activity on activity master 23B, “Signs of Grace.”
2. **Have** the students silently read and respond to the question. When everyone has finished, invite volunteers to share ways in which the sacraments they celebrated led them to experience God’s grace in their lives.

## Live It!

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the “Live It!” sidebar on page 261.
2. **Call on** volunteers to explain what it means to be attuned at Mass. **Lead** the students to understand that being attuned at Mass begins with our actions—that is, that we

join with the assembly in praying the prayers of the Mass and in the responses, as well as in singing the hymns. It also means our thoughts are focused on the words we are praying and are connected to our actions. Finally, it means that when Mass concludes and we leave church, our words and actions throughout the week reflect what we heard and expressed during Mass.

## For More Information

### The Benedictine Order

Our liturgy owes much to the study and prayer of the Order of Saint Benedict (OSB), or Benedictine Order. This order of monks and nuns gives high priority to the celebration of the liturgy of the Church—the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and the Liturgy of the Hours. The motto of the order is “Work and pray.” The Rule of Saint Benedict urges the monks and nuns, “Let nothing . . . be put before the work of God” (chapter 43). That is, let nothing take precedence over the liturgy. The monks and nuns leave their work and study behind when it is time for prayer.

The rule further states that, while at prayer, “Let us take part in the psalmody in such a way that our mind may be in harmony with our voice” (chapter 19). This is much like the phrase from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* quoted in the “Live It” paragraph. Saint Benedict and his rule still inspire the Church today.

## What You See Is What You Get

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud “What You See Is What You Get” on pages 262 to 264.
2. **Lead** the students in a discussion, using the following questions:
  - What examples from the Scriptures show how Jesus transformed a person visibly? (*Responses should include examples of Jesus’ healing miracles, such as the healing of the paralyzed man [see Mark 2:1–12], the healing of blind Bartimaeus [see Mark 10:46–52], or the raising of Lazarus from the dead [see John 11:1–44].*)
  - What examples from the Scriptures show how Jesus transformed a person spiritually, not visibly? (*Responses should include Jesus’ forgiveness of and conversion of sinners, such as the woman caught in adultery [see John 8:1–11], Zacchaeus the tax collector [see Luke 19:1–10], and the good thief hanging on the cross alongside Jesus [see Luke 23:39–43].*)
3. **Explain** that through the sacraments, God transforms us. Through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, he cleanses us of our sins and gives us the strength to avoid sin in the future. Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, he fills us with the gift of the Holy Spirit so we may live our mission as Christ’s disciples. In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, God transforms the substance of the bread and wine, so they truly become the Body and Blood of the Lord.



## Fun Fact

1. Read aloud the “Fun Fact” sidebar on page 262.
2. Ask the students to name objects they have blessed or blessings they, or people they know, have received. Have them identify the occasion for the blessing, such as the birth of a child or a move into a new home, and the ceremony through which the blessing was bestowed.

## Did You Know?

1. Invite a volunteer to read aloud the “Did You Know?” sidebar on page 264.
2. Explain that blessings are one of the five basic forms of prayer and that in a prayer of blessing, we acknowledge God as the source of all our gifts and we exalt him for his greatness.
3. Invite volunteers to share times when they have been blessed, either formally, as in a prayer service, or informally, by a parent or other relative. Then ask them to share times when they have blessed another person.

## Did You Know?

1. Invite a volunteer to read aloud the “Did You Know?” sidebar on page 263.
2. Call on volunteers to respond to each of the questions posed in the sidebar. Help the students understand the difference between blessings, which are bestowed by God, and lucky charms and other superstitions, which contradict our faith in God.

## Activity

1. Direct the students’ attention to the last activity on activity master 23B, “Writing a Blessing.”
2. Have the students read the activity directions and write their blessings. You may wish to brainstorm some examples of what the students may ask God for in their blessings. When everyone has finished, invite volunteers to reverently read aloud their blessings.

## Living a Changed Life Every Day

1. Call on a volunteer to read aloud “Living a Changed Life Every Day” on page 265.
2. Explain that sacramentals are symbols and rituals related to the sacraments. Sacramentals are objects (such as crucifixes, statues, or blessed ashes used on Ash Wednesday) or rituals (such as making the Sign of the Cross on someone’s forehead or venerating the Bible by kissing it).
3. Help differentiate sacramentals from sacraments by explaining that the Church, rather than Christ, established sacramentals. We are encouraged to use them as part of our spiritual practices.

## Think About It!

1. **Read aloud** the “Think About It!” sidebar on page 265.
2. **Reiterate** that sacramentals are related to the sacraments and that they are part of our prayer and spiritual lives. Clarify that sacramentals may help prepare us for the sacraments and that the blessings they impart come from God.

## Additional Activity

### Inventing a Ritual

1. **Ask** the students to describe rituals with which they are familiar. Here are some ideas: singing “Happy Birthday” and having a cake with candles on it for a person celebrating a birthday; beeping a car horn when leaving the house; shaking hands when saying hello and good-bye; using a special handshake with special gestures for friends; a child’s wanting a glass of milk and a story before going to bed every night.
2. **Explain** that a ritual is something done in a certain way, over and over again. A ritual usually helps us make a transition from one thing to another, one place to another, or one state of being to another—from solitude to companionship, from here to there, from one age to another, from waking to sleep. The rituals of our sacraments help us make the transition from our life as we ordinarily live it to our life in God, as God sees us. With the help of the sacraments, we make this transition over and over again.
3. **Place** the students in groups of three or four. Explain that the opening prayer is a transition from life as it is, to life as students of the Catholic faith. The closing prayer is a transition from our faith group to the outside world again.
4. **Direct** the students to expand those moments to a ritual of transition. Ask them to add words, songs, or actions to that ritual. Assign the groups to an opening or closing transition. Tell them that they will use these transition rituals in addition to our opening and closing prayers in the coming meetings of our class.
5. **Circulate** among the students to offer encouragement and suggestions if needed.
6. **Remind** the students to write down the gestures, words, and songs they would like to use.
7. **Explain** that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, this is how the liturgy of the Church began. Jesus gave us the sacraments so we might transition into him.



## Closing Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 23C, “Sacraments Word Search.”
2. **Read aloud** the instructions and direct the students to complete the sentences and to find each answer in the word search.
3. **Review** the answers to the statements with the class.

## Closing Prayer



1. **Direct** the students to open their handbooks to page 256. When all are ready, ask a volunteer to read aloud the prayer in the “Pray It!” sidebar.
2. **Conclude** with the following:
  - God, our loving Creator, we ask you to bless us throughout our days. Help us to recognize the gifts you give us each day and to use them to bring you praise, to grow in our love for you, and to lead others to you. Amen.

**Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

## Chapter Test

1. The chapter test will help the students recall what they have learned. The test covers the key points of the chapter.
2. **Distribute** copies of the chapter 23 test from the *Catholic Connections for Middle Schoolers Test Booklet*.
3. **Explain** to the students that completing the test exercises will help them remember the content of the chapter they have just completed. **Direct** them to work quietly to complete the test.
4. **Collect** and **grade** the test. Alternatively, you may wish to **review** the answers to the test as a group. **Review** with the students any items that were generally misunderstood. **Refer** to the answer key at the back of the test booklet for the correct answers as well as a list of the pages on which the answers can be found.

### Media Connections (optional)

- The DVD *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who* (2008, 88 minutes, rated A-I and G) is a children's classic that features Horton, an elephant who discovers the microscopic town of Whoville on a speck of dust. Unfortunately, only Horton's elephant-sized ears can hear the voice of the Whoville mayor. Trouble erupts when the jungle's head kangaroo insists that if you can't see something, it doesn't exist. This confrontation between the unbelieving kangaroo and Horton takes place in the first 15 minutes of the film. This segment could be used as the session opener, right after prayer.
- The DVD *Close Encounters with the Sacraments* (12 minutes, Oblate Media & Communication). The little angel from *Close Encounters with the Beatitudes* returns to help another troubled student—this time a youngster struggling with the complex problem of just what the sacraments mean in the everyday lives of elementary school students. Young actors appear in age-appropriate situations, so your students will easily enjoy and relate to this fanciful story combining live action with animation, giving them a general overview of the history and meaning of the sacraments. Study guide included. Ages: grades 3–6.