

SACRAMENTS

The Latin word *sacramentum* means "a sign of the sacred". The seven sacraments of the Church are outwardly instituted by Christ, that confer grace upon those who receive them. The material and spoken actions present in the different rituals point to what is sacred and significant for Christians. In this sense sacraments are analogous to doors which open up to us an experience of the sacred. With a validly celebrated sacrament God's grace is conferred *ex opere operato* ("by the work worked"). God freely offers his gift of sanctifying grace to us. However, the recipient must prepare to receive the fruits of this grace and thereafter work, supported by others, to nurture and sustain them. This is why the Church everywhere seeks to promote a proper understanding of the sacraments. 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.

[Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1131] Each of the seven sacraments offers the faithful a distinctive experience of Jesus Christ and confers different graces. Together the sacraments accompany us on our Christian journey on earth, mirroring in many respects the stages of natural life. The Church has sub-divided the seven sacraments in the following way:

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation Baptism Confirmation Holy Eucharist These are the sacraments of foundation for every Christian life. They signify respectively our new life in Christ; our strengthening; and the reception of food for eternal life. These sacraments complete our membership of the Body of Christ. They ground the universal call to holiness among the People of God and our participation in the mission of evangelization.

The Sacraments of Healing Penance and Reconciliation Anointing of the Sick Through these sacraments the Church "empowered by the Holy Spirit" continues Christ's work of healing and salvation among its members.

The Sacraments at the Service of Communion Holy Orders Matrimony The salvation of others is the goal of these sacraments. Recipients offer themselves in service to other people. Men ordained into the apostolic ministry and spouses in marriage are entrusted with a particular mission in the Church.

A parish's vocation can be defined only according to the Church's sacramental structure. It is here that Christ's presence in the paschal mystery is visibly signified! No effort should be spared to make available the principal gifts, which are the sacraments, at every stage of our life. (Pope John Paul II addressing a group of Bishops from France on 25 January 1997)

Select from the menu to learn more about each of the seven sacraments.