

Living in Christ

saint mary's press

The Sacraments

Encounters with Christ



Joanna Dailey

Living in Christ

The Sacraments

Encounters with Christ

Joanna Dailey



saint mary's press

The Subcommittee on the Catechism, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found that this catechetical high school text, copyright 2012, is in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and that it fulfills the requirements of Course V: “Sacraments as Privileged Encounters with Jesus Christ” of the *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*.

Nihil Obstat: Rev. William M. Becker, STD
Censor Librorum
October 11, 2011

Imprimatur: † Most Rev. John M. Quinn, DD
Bishop of Winona
October 11, 2011

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat or imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed, nor do they assume any legal responsibility associated with publication.

The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; Joanna Dailey, development editor; Maura Thompson Hagarty, PhD, contributing editor and theological reviewer. Prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary’s Press

Cover Image: © The Crosiers / Gene Plaisted, OSC

The publisher also wishes to thank Rev. Richard Ginther, MA, who advised the publishing team and reviewed the work in progress.

Copyright © 2012 by Saint Mary’s Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320, www.smp.org. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

1151 (PO4169)

ISBN 978-1-59982-116-0, Saint Mary’s Press Online Learning Environment

Contents

Introduction	6
------------------------	---

Section 1: An Introduction to Liturgy and the Sacraments

Part 1: Liturgy 9

Article 1: What Is Liturgy?	10
Article 2: The Holy Trinity and the Liturgy	14
Article 3: The Liturgical Year.	18
Article 4: Liturgical Rites and Traditions.	24
Article 5: Celebrating the Liturgy	27

Part 2: Sacraments 31

Article 6: Symbols and Rituals	32
Article 7: Sacraments: Sign and Mystery	35
Article 8: Sacraments: Signs of Christ.	38
Article 9: Sacraments: Signs of Redemption.	43
Article 10: The Praying Church	46

Section 2: The Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Part 1

Part 1: Baptism 54

Article 11: Introduction to Baptism	55
Article 12: Christian Initiation in the Early Centuries	59
Article 13: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults I	61
Article 14: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults II	66
Article 15: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults III	70
Article 16: The Rite of Baptism for Children	76
Article 17: Baptism: The Source of Christian Living	82

Part 2: Confirmation 89

Article 18: The Holy Spirit among Us. 90
Article 19: Confirmation: East and West 94
Article 20: The Rite of Confirmation. 97
Article 21: Life in the Holy Spirit. 104
Article 22: Discernment of God’s Will 108

**Section 3: The Sacraments
of Christian Initiation: Part 2**

**Part 1: The Eucharist: Culmination of Christian
Initiation 115**

Article 23: What Is the Eucharist? 116
Article 24: The Eucharist in the Scriptures. 123
Article 25: The Eucharist: Then and Now 127

Part 2: The Celebration of the Eucharist. 134

Article 26: Gather Faithfully Together. 135
Article 27: The Liturgy of the Word 140
Article 28: The Liturgy of the Eucharist 146
Article 29: The Liturgy of the Eucharist: The Eucharistic
Prayer and Communion Rite 152
Article 30: Ministries at Mass. 159

Part 3: The Eucharist in Daily Life 165

Article 31: The Concluding Rites: To Love and Serve 166
Article 32: The Power of the Eucharist 171
Article 33: Living the Eucharist 175

Section 4: The Sacraments of Healing

Part 1: The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation 183

Article 34: The Sacrament of Pardon and Peace	184
Article 35: Scriptural and Historical Background	188
Article 36: The Rite of Penance and Reconciliation	193
Article 37: Penance and Reconciliation in Our Lives.	198

Part 2: The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick 203

Article 38: The Sacrament of Healing and Strength	204
Article 39: Scriptural and Historical Roots.	208
Article 40: The Rite of Anointing of the Sick	210
Article 41: Christ’s Healing Power	216

Section 5: The Sacraments at the Service of Communion

Part 1: The Sacrament of Holy Orders. 221

Article 42: Consecrated to God’s People	222
Article 43: The Priesthood of the New Covenant	226
Article 44: The Degrees of Ordination	231
Article 45: The Graces of the Sacrament.	236

Part 2: The Sacrament of Matrimony. 240

Article 46: Lifelong Covenant.	241
Article 47: Witnesses to Love	245
Article 48: The Rite of Marriage	249
Article 49: Lifelong Journey	252

Glossary	258
--------------------	-----

Index	264
-----------------	-----

Acknowledgments	276
---------------------------	-----

Introduction

You may be familiar with the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” We usually sing this hymn during Advent, when the Church is preparing for Christmas. It comes from this passage in the Book of Isaiah: “The young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel.” (7:14).

In his Gospel, Matthew quotes this verse from Isaiah in describing the birth of Jesus, and explains the meaning of *Emmanuel* by adding, “which means, ‘God is with us’” (1:23). Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

But before I had ever read the Prophet Isaiah, when I was just a grade-schooler, I read the following phrase, painted in the dome above the altar of my parish church: “GOD WITH US.” These words were like a marquee over every Eucharist, every Sacrament celebrated in that sacred space. What were these words telling me? What did they mean? Something very important, for sure, or they would not have been written there, high above the altar, in fancy, beautiful letters, for all to see.

Gradually, I realized that “GOD WITH US” written above the altar meant the Eucharist itself, and indeed every Sacrament. For in the Sacraments, we, as unique individuals, encounter Emmanuel, Jesus Christ, who is himself God.

So that we might know the Father’s love, he sent his only Son to live among us. When Jesus walked on earth, he was limited to one place and one time. But at his Resurrection, he broke the boundaries of time and space. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene (see John 20:11–18) and to the disciples on their way to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13–35). He then walked through locked doors to offer the greeting of “Peace!” to his Apostles and disciples (see John 20:19–20). The Ascension marked the end of these extraordinary appearances. But, most wonderfully for us, Jesus had entrusted the Sacraments to his Church so that we could meet him, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in our time and in our place, right where we are.

But to meet Christ in the Sacraments, we need faith. We received this gift of faith at Baptism (united with the faith of the Church, which comes before our own individual faith and which enriches our faith), but faith needs to be nurtured. So I hope you read this book as more than an academic exercise. I hope that as you read about the meaning, history, and practice of the Sacraments, your faith will be nurtured and strengthened, and you will find more reasons for hope and joy.

Because Jesus Christ loves you, he wants to be with you as your Source of life and peace. You may not always feel his presence, but he is with you in the Sacraments, offering you what he offered his Apostles and disciples so long ago: the saving gift of his friendship. As the Apostle Peter wrote: “Even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). May you too find deep joy in your encounters with Christ in the Sacraments.

In the name of Jesus,
Joanna Dailey

Section 1

**An
Introduction
to Liturgy
and the
Sacraments**

Part 1

Liturgy

What gives meaning to human life? What shapes our existence, our journey, here on Earth and beyond? Through the centuries, answers to these questions have been communicated through the actions and the words of the Church's worship. In the liturgy and in the Sacraments, the grace of God, the life of God, becomes available to our hearts, minds, and senses. The answer to the ultimate question of meaning is not a *what* but a *Who*. In acknowledging God in the liturgy and thanking him for his gifts to us (especially the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ), we discover who God is. In the liturgy we discover that God is near to us, that he penetrates our lives with his life and his grace. The Jews of ancient times marveled, "For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7). We who hold in our hands the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ we receive in the Eucharist, can marvel all the more. As we celebrate together, the liturgy shapes us and guides our journey, because through the celebration we encounter the living Christ.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 1: What Is Liturgy? (page 10)
- Article 2: The Holy Trinity and the Liturgy (page 14)
- Article 3: The Liturgical Year (page 18)
- Article 4: Liturgical Rites and Traditions (page 24)
- Article 5: Celebrating the Liturgy (page 27)

Article

1 What Is Liturgy?

liturgy

The Church's official, public, communal prayer. It is God's work, in which the People of God participate. The Church's most important liturgy is the Eucharist, or the Mass.

The word *liturgy* has ancient roots that can help us to understand the Church's worship today. Picture this:

A Roman centurion on horseback rides through a crowded pathway leading to the market. "Make way! Make way! Make way for the *leitourgia!*" he announces. He is followed by a road crew carrying picks and axes. They will remove the large stones from the path, smooth it out, lay handmade bricks, and make a real road.

This is a *leitourgia*—a liturgy. The literal meaning of *leitourgia* is "the people's work." The Church adopted the word *liturgy* as her own. The **liturgy** is the Church's official, public, communal prayer. It is God's work in which the People of God participate. And, of all the liturgies the Church celebrates, the Eucharist is the most important. When we gather to carry out Jesus' commandment to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19), we are responding to God's invitation and his gracious love.

Not every public gathering for prayer is liturgy. A group prayer service is public and communal, but it is not liturgy because it is not official—that is, it is not governed by the Church. Private prayer is important, but, because it is not official or public, it is not liturgy.

Let us define a few terms. When we say "the liturgy," we mean the liturgy as a whole—all the Sacraments, including the Eucharist, as well as liturgies that are not Sacraments, such as the Liturgy of the Hours (see the sidebar "Liturgical Books") and Catholic funerals. When we say "a liturgy," we mean a particular Mass or liturgical celebration.

The Work of God

The liturgy is primarily the work of God (in Latin, *opus Dei*), in which we participate. What does this mean? God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who is himself God, so that we might become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus sharers in his own divine

An entrance procession, with an Entrance Chant or song, is usually part of the Introductory Rites of the liturgy. The Introductory Rites prepare our hearts and minds to participate fully in the celebration.

© Bill Wittman / www.ppwittman.com



Liturgical Books

Liturgical books are indispensable to the liturgy. In keeping with the solemnity and significance of the liturgy, liturgical books are beautifully designed and printed, sometimes with gold or red leather covers. You may have noticed at least a few of the following books:

- *Roman Missal* (or *Sacramentary*): This is the book the priest uses at the altar and at his chair. It includes all the prayers of the Mass.
- *Lectionary for Mass*: This book contains the readings of the Mass, including the Gospels, with the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel acclamations.
- *Book of the Gospels*: This is a large book, containing only the Gospel readings from the *Lectionary*. It is often carried in procession. The Gospel is read from this book.
- *Rite of Baptism for Children*: You may have seen this used at Baptism. This rite and other rites are taken from *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, volume I and volume II. Volume I contains the rites for all the Sacraments (except the Eucharist and Holy Orders). Volume II contains the rites for ordinations, blessings, and consecrations of persons, and blessings of objects and places. If used in the liturgy, each of these rites is bound as a separate book.
- *Liturgy of the Hours*: This is printed in various forms, but is usually several volumes, one for each Church season of the year. It includes the hymns, readings, and prayers for each of the seven “hours” (or prayer times) of each day.

life. Wounded by Original Sin, the sin of our first parents, we, humanity, needed God's help. Even though human beings lost the original state of perfect, loving communion that Adam and Eve enjoyed, God has been working throughout history to restore that state to us. He called Abraham to be the father of a Chosen People and formed a sacred Covenant with them. He gave them a divine Law, the Old Law, to teach them how to live. He gave them rituals and a priesthood and sent judges, kings, and prophets to guide them. Unfortunately, sin and death prevailed until God's ultimate saving act, the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ. When the

right time came, God intervened—not with yet one more prophet, but with his only-begotten Son, who gave his life for the forgiveness of sins and made new life for us possible. Through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension—the Paschal Mystery—Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption. Through Christ’s work, we received a New Law, which is the fulfillment of the Old Law. The New Law, a law of love, grace, and freedom, is the grace of the Holy Spirit. Whenever we gather for liturgy, especially the Sacraments, we celebrate, above all, Christ’s Paschal Mystery and we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to live according to the New Law.

God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—continues to intervene. “God . . . is the ‘living God’¹ who gives life and intervenes in history” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 2112). Through the Church and in the liturgy he is at work bringing about our salvation. As God’s work, the liturgy involves his action, but it involves our action too. The liturgy is the “action” or work of the whole Christ: “It is the whole *community*, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates” the liturgy (*CCC*, 1140). The Church gathers for liturgy in response to God’s call, and when we participate in the liturgy, our words and actions express the spiritual work that God is doing.

The liturgy is the focal point of our participation in God’s work, but it is not the Church’s only way of cooperating in his work in the world. Teaching and preaching the Gospel prepares good soil for the seed of faith and worship to grow in God’s People. In faithful word and action, the liturgy truly bears good fruit in our lives.

Catholic Wisdom

Christ Is Present in the Liturgy

Pope Saint Leo the Great gave a sermon in which he taught that Christ is with us in the liturgy and in the Sacraments. He described Christ’s Ascension into Heaven and then declared: “And so that which till then was visible of our Redeemer was changed into a sacramental presence, and that faith might be more excellent and stronger, sight gave way to doctrine” (*Sermon 74*). We no longer see Christ in the flesh, but he is present in the liturgy.

Liturgy, Scripture, and Tradition

All of the Church's Sacraments and liturgies have Christ as their origin, yet he did not dictate all aspects of the liturgy. So where does liturgy as we know it today come from? It comes through liturgy, Scripture, and Tradition. The essential elements of the liturgy have been handed on to us through Scripture and Tradition, while other elements that we call traditions (lowercase *t*) have emerged over time. Scripture and Tradition are distinct, yet very closely related. Both transmit the Word of God. Together they form a single sacred Deposit of Faith. The Deposit of Faith, the treasure of the Church handed on from the time of the Apostles and contained in Scripture and Tradition, makes clear the truths that cannot be laid aside because they are part of God's Revelation, truths like these: Jesus Christ is true God and true man, the Pope is the successor of Saint Peter and the head of the Church, and the Trinity is one God in three Divine Persons. The Deposit of Faith does not change. The **Magisterium**, the living teaching office of the Church (all bishops in communion with the Pope) is responsible, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for interpreting the deposit of faith.

The traditions, with a small *t*, that have influenced, and continue to influence, the liturgy are customs, things we do because they are part of our history and culture. They can be incorporated into liturgical celebrations when they express within them the great Tradition of the Church. For example, the priest washes his hands after receiving the gifts of bread and wine at the Preparation of the Gifts. Originally he washed his hands because the gifts he was receiving included the offerings of the faithful toward the upkeep of the parish church and for the relief of the poor. These were usually food and other farm products. The hand-washing remains in the Eucharist in an abbreviated form, and is accompanied by the priest's prayer for purification: "Wash me, O Lord,

The washing of hands has been preserved in the liturgy even when there is no longer a practical reason for it. Consider the words the priest speaks to understand why the washing of hands is still symbolically important.



Magisterium

The Church's living teaching office, which consists of all the bishops, in communion with the Pope.

© Bill Wittman / www.wpwittman.com





Tradition

This word (from the Latin, meaning “to hand on”) refers to the process of passing on the Gospel message. Tradition, which began with the oral communication of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written down in the Scriptures, is handed down and lived out in the life of the Church, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Trinity

From the Latin *trinus*, meaning “threefold,” referring to the central mystery of the Christian faith that God exists as a communion of three distinct and interrelated Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to human reason alone and is known through Divine Revelation only.

from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (*Roman Missal*). The change in the role of hand-washing occurred over centuries, yet in this change, Tradition was preserved.

Like the truths of faith, the liturgy is guided by the Magisterium. This is what makes the liturgy the official worship of the Church. Essential elements handed on through Scripture and Tradition are always retained, while aspects of our liturgical celebrations that come from traditions can be kept, modified, or eliminated under the guidance of the Magisterium. Within these guidelines, your parish may make its own decisions about such things as particular hymns or songs to sing.

Handed On from Christ

The word *Tradition* comes from a significant word in our lives of faith: *traditio*. It is a Latin word, meaning “to hand on or to give over.” Our liturgy has been handed on to us from Jesus, first when he “took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples, said “Take and eat; this is my body” (Matthew 26:26, italic added), and then later, when he died and “gave up his spirit” (Matthew 27:50, italic added) to his Father, and to us. In Saint Paul’s account of the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, the earliest account of the words of institution found in Scripture, he notes: “I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread . . .” (1 Corinthians 11:23, italics added). Our liturgy has been handed on to us, as it was to Saint Paul, as the richest inheritance of the Church. †

Article

2 The Holy Trinity and the Liturgy

The Church’s liturgy is Trinitarian. In the liturgy the three Divine Persons of the **Trinity**—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are at work, and through the liturgy the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the central mystery of the Christian faith, is more deeply revealed. As a sign of this, every liturgy begins, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And every liturgy ends with the celebrant’s asking for the blessing of the Holy Trinity.

The Rublev Icon of the Holy Trinity

(Andrei Rublev, 1425)

Some treasures of the East have been discovered by the West. The artistic expression of faith in the Western Church usually takes the form of statues, frescoes, murals, paintings, and stained-glass windows. In the Eastern Churches (both those Churches united with the Catholic Church as well as the Eastern Orthodox Church, sadly separated from the Catholic Church by schism), artistic expressions of faith commonly take the form of icons.

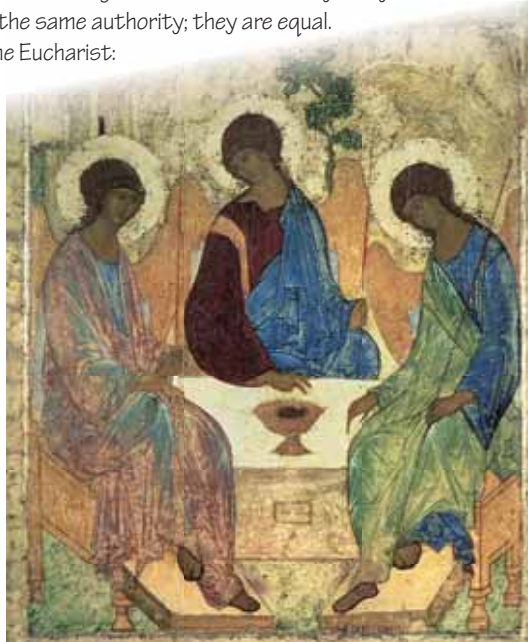
The word *icon* is from a Greek word meaning “image.” An icon is an image of Jesus, Mary, or one of the saints. An iconographer is the painter or “writer” of the icon. Writing an icon is a spiritual process that involves preparing by praying and fasting.

The Rublev icon is particularly revered because it has layers of meaning. On the surface, it is an icon of the three angels welcomed by Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews and “our father in faith” (*Roman Missal*). In the Book of Genesis, chapter 18, Abraham meets unexpected visitors and shares a meal with them.

The three angels symbolize the Trinity: God the Son is in the center (his two fingers symbolizing that he is true God and true man), God the Father is at the left, and God the Holy Spirit is on the right. The thin staffs they carry symbolize that they all have the same authority; they are equal.

The next layer portrays the Eucharist: God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—has laid a table for us. The sacrificial lamb, the Lamb of God (the Body of Christ), is set in the middle of the table.

As we look at the icon, we see an open space at the table. There is no barrier between the Trinity and the viewer looking on. This open space is an invitation. We are drawn in, invited to sit at the table and to share the life and love of the Trinity.





© Bill Wittman / www.wpwittman.com

At the Concluding Doxology, we pray with the priest, “Through him, and with him, and in him . . .” and proclaim our Amen. How can this Doxology and Amen shape our Christian lives? How can we live each day in and with Christ?

Each Person of the Trinity is involved in the Church’s liturgy. We acknowledge the Father as the source of all the blessings of creation, and salvation, especially the gifts of his Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, who became incarnate in order to redeem us, is central in the Church’s liturgy, because in every liturgy Christ’s gift of himself for the sake of our salvation is made present to us, here and now, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, took on a human nature without losing his divine nature in order to save us from the tyranny of sin and death. He showed us the depths of God’s love, enabling us to share in his divine nature. When we participate in liturgy, we celebrate the work of salvation that Christ accomplished for us through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

Something that makes Christ present to us is called a sacrament; thus we say that liturgy and Christ’s work within it are sacramental. The Body of Christ, the Church, is also a sacrament, because the Holy Spirit also works through her to make Christ present in the world and to be the instrument of grace and salvation for all. The Church is thus the sacrament of the Holy Trinity’s communion with human beings. In every liturgy, especially the Seven Sacraments, the Church encounters God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through this encounter and the outpouring of God’s grace, we are justified, which means we are freed from sin, and we are sanctified, which means we are made holy and share in the divine life.

Sharing in God’s life means that we are drawn into communion with the Trinity. During our life on earth, we are united with God in a profound way through the Sacraments. And we live with the hope that during our life after death, we will experience perfect communion and happiness with God forever in Heaven.

When we celebrate the liturgy, we celebrate with not only the people we can see with us but also with all the angels, saints, and those who have gone before us in faith. The saving work of Christ extends our liturgy on earth into Heaven. In the liturgy the boundaries of time and space are broken, and we are one in Christ. In every liturgy, we participate in, and also anticipate, the heavenly liturgy that is our ultimate goal.

In the liturgy we remember the saints in Heaven—first of all the holy Mother of God, then the Apostles, the martyrs, and other saints—on fixed days of the liturgical year, not for their own accomplishments but for Christ’s work of salvation in them. Their trials and final victory encourage us as we journey to the Father in Christ. Thus the Church on earth is united with the liturgy of Heaven.

How, then, is Christ present in the liturgy? He is present in the priest, who acts in the person of Christ. He is present in the assembly, because we are the Body of Christ. He is present in the Word of God, the Scriptures. God’s Word is an essential element of every liturgy and is proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word. In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ is present, in a special way, in his Body and Blood, which we receive during Communion.

The Holy Spirit is active in the liturgy, preparing us to encounter Christ. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ’s presence in the assembly, in Scripture, and in the sacramental actions of liturgical celebrations. By his transforming power, the Holy Spirit makes the saving work of Christ present and active, here and now, for us. When we leave the liturgy, we carry the message of God’s love to all we meet, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand what it means to say that “the saving power of Christ is present and active, here and now.” In the liturgy and the Sacraments, we do not merely remember and celebrate the past, because the liturgy and the Sacraments are the means by which the saving power of the Risen Christ is made available to us today. Christ is alive and is not limited by time and space. In the liturgy his power is just as available to us as it was to the Apostles and the disciples. Of course, he is with us at all times, but in the liturgy and the Sacraments, in a special way, he keeps his promise to be with us always.

This Trinitarian dimension of liturgical prayer is summed up in the Concluding Doxology (from the Greek *doxa*, meaning “praise”) that we are invited to affirm with the Amen:

Through him [Jesus Christ],
and with him,
and in him,
O God, almighty Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honor and glory is yours,

for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

(Roman Missal)

If we live our lives in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ, our fountain of goodness and love will never run dry, as promised in the Book of Isaiah:

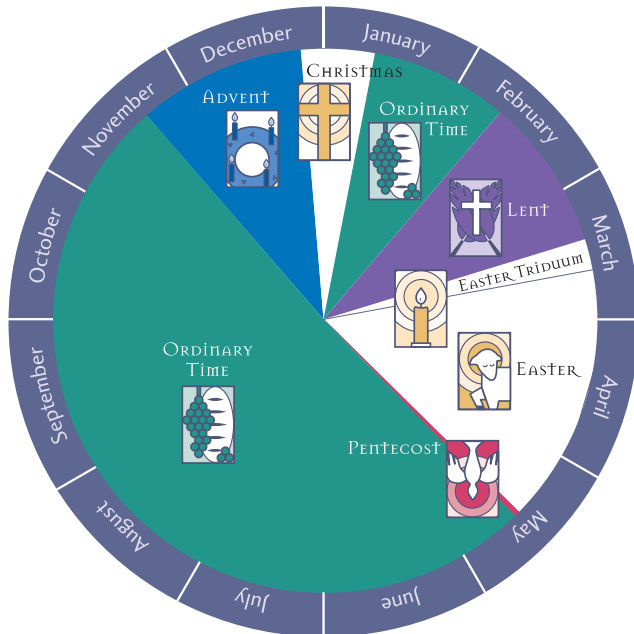
They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength,
they will soar on eagles' wings;
They will run and not grow weary,
walk and not grow faint.

(40:31) †

Article 3 The Liturgical Year

In southern Indiana, there is an underground river, appropriately called the Lost River. At several points in its pathway, it simply disappears. It dips underground and gurgles beneath the surface for miles, only to arise again, sometimes in quiet pools, sometimes in plumes of water, depending upon the limestone caves, caverns, and channels underground through which it travels. It has been called one of America's natural wonders.

Look at the chart pictured here. What liturgical season is the Church celebrating now? In what season does your birthday usually fall? The birthdays of family and friends? Why are liturgical colors important to the seasons?



A Liturgical Pilgrim

We know much about the early liturgy of the Church through the writings of Egeria, either a nun or laywoman who spent much time on pilgrimage from her home in Spain or France to the Holy Land. The Church in Jerusalem had the privilege of celebrating the liturgy at the very places where Jesus lived, healed, taught, died, and was risen. Through Egeria's writings we discover that, by the fourth century, the liturgy of the Church in Jerusalem was well established. Egeria writes of the liturgical celebrations on Sundays and holy days, like Epiphany and the Feast of the Presentation (February 2). We can recognize our traditions in her description of the Lenten fast and our Passion or Palm Sunday procession in her vivid account of it. She describes the procession with the bishop and all the community from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem: "And all the children of the neighborhood, even those who are too young to walk, are carried by their parents on their shoulders, all of them bearing branches, some of palms and some of olives, and thus the bishop is escorted in the same manner as the Lord was of old" (Egeria's Description of the Liturgical Year in Jerusalem: Translation).

We owe this liturgical pilgrim a debt of gratitude for using her excellent skills of observation and expression to bring our ancient roots alive for us today.

For many people the **liturgical year** is like an underground river. The liturgical year gurgles beneath the surface of our days, and then, suddenly, it's Advent! or Christmas! or Lent! or Easter! The liturgical year rises to the surface of our consciousness, and we catch up to it, at least for a little while.

But the liturgical year is always there, and is always *now*. The liturgical year celebrates God's time, and is therefore timeless. The liturgical year provides a structure in which the universal Church throughout the world celebrates the whole mystery of Christ—from his Incarnation and birth, through his life, suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, to Pentecost—and prays in anticipation of Christ's coming again at the end of time. All of these saving events are re-membered (put together again) and made present to us now.

Let us follow this calendar—as if following a life-giving river—from season to season. How does it nourish our lives and help us to grow as members of the Body of Christ?



liturgical year

The annual cycle of religious feasts and seasons that forms the context for the Church's worship. During the liturgical year, we remember and celebrate God the Father's saving plan as it is revealed through the life of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Advent

The liturgical year begins in Advent. This season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Advent is the time of preparation before Christmas and lasts four weeks (the fourth week is typically not a full week). Its liturgical color is purple, to signify waiting. Advent is a time of hope, of waiting, and of preparing. What are we preparing for?

In our culture, preparation in this context often has one dimension: we are preparing for Christmas Day. But as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century monk, writer, and teacher, explained, our waiting and preparing has three dimensions: (1) We are waiting to celebrate the Word Made Flesh at Christmas; (2) We are waiting to celebrate the birth of the Word of God in our own hearts at Christmas; and (3) We are waiting for the final coming of Christ in glory at the end of time. Our waiting is an active waiting.

We are preparing to be visited by our Savior. We are waiting and preparing for our Redeemer. We are making room in our hearts and in our lives for the One who was sent away because there was no room for him in the inn. And we are waiting for Christ's second coming, his final advent, when all things will be fulfilled in him (see Ephesians 1:7–10).



© Saint Mary's Press / Mara Fenske

Christmas

Laney looked around at the chaotic family room. The Christmas tree glittered in the corner, and under it lay mounds of torn wrapping paper and ribbon—the evidence of the successful endeavors of her younger brothers and sisters to open their gifts in the shortest amount of time possible. Of course she and her parents had also joined in the fun. Laney smiled a little sadly. It had been a good Christmas, but now it was all over.

Laney could not have been more wrong! The Christmas season begins on December 25 and lasts until the Solemnity of the Baptism of



© Saint Mary's Press / Mara Fenske

the Lord (the third Sunday after Christmas Day). Its liturgical color is white or gold, to signify joy. During this time the Church reflects on the wonder and meaning of the Incarnation. The Word of God Made Flesh certainly takes more than one day to celebrate!

One solemnity of particular note during this season is the Feast of the Epiphany. Originally celebrated on what is now the twelfth day of Christmas (January 6), the Epiphany celebrates the Revelation of the Savior to the Gentiles (the people of the non-Jewish world). In many parts of the world, Epiphany is the day for parties and gift-giving. Epiphany has been moved to the Sunday preceding January 6, to give us the opportunity to celebrate it with our parish communities.

Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time is not called ordinary because the Church considers it “nothing special.” It is called ordinary because its days are numbered with ordinal numbers (that is, the First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, and so forth). There are two blocks of Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar: The first one is between the Christmas season and Lent, and the second one, which is longer, is between Pentecost and Advent. The liturgical color of Ordinary Time is green, symbolizing hope.

In Ordinary Time the Church reflects on the life of Jesus Christ—his mission, his miracles, and his teachings. During this time we have the opportunity, day by day and week by week, to know Christ better, to internalize his teachings and values as we encounter him in Word and Sacrament.



© Saint Mary's Press / Mara Fenske

Lent

Before Christ came into the world, we were like sheep without a shepherd. But Jesus came, redeemed us through his suffering and death, and led us back to the Father. During Lent we recall Christ's Passion—his suffering and death on the cross. Lent, the most solemn and reflective time of the year, begins on Ash Wednesday. Its liturgical color is purple,



© Saint Mary's Press / Mara Fenske

symbolizing penance. During Lent the Church encourages us to perform three Christian practices in a more focused way: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The whole Church, as the Body of Christ, commits to these works together, supporting one another in our efforts to remember Saint Paul's question: "Do you not know . . . that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). During Lent we recall that Christ redeemed us through his death, and we prepare to celebrate his Resurrection on the most glorious day of the year, the Solemnity of Solemnities: Easter.

Easter Triduum

The week preceding Easter begins on Palm (Passion) Sunday and is called *Holy Week*. During this week we remember in the most intense way possible the sufferings and death of Christ.

The last days of the week, called the *Triduum* (meaning "Three Days") are the most solemn of the entire year. A liturgical "day" always begins at sundown (or Evening Prayer) on the night before. Our liturgical celebration of Sunday really begins at Evening Prayer on Saturday evening. This follows the Jewish custom and is part of our Jewish inheritance. In the same way, the *Triduum* begins on Thursday evening and ends on Sunday evening.

On *Holy Thursday* we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper in the evening, and we commemorate Jesus' gift of himself in the Eucharist. A foot-washing ceremony reminds us that, as followers of Jesus, we are to serve one another (see John 13:14–15). On this day we also recall the institution of the priesthood.

On *Good Friday* we remember Jesus' Passion and death. We venerate the cross in some way. We receive Holy



© Saint Mary's Press / Mara Fenske

Communion, reserved from the Mass of the Lord's Supper, but there is no Mass today. Every Eucharist is a sacrifice because it makes the sacrifice of the cross present. The only sacrifice we offer on Good Friday is the spiritual offering of Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary.

On *Holy Saturday* we eagerly prepare for the Easter Vigil, which begins at night. This is the greatest night, the most beautiful night, of the year. "The Church, keeping watch, awaits the Resurrection of Christ and celebrates it in the Sacraments" (*Universal Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, 21). We celebrate with fire, candles, water, the singing of the Exsultet, readings, and the welcoming of the elect (those preparing to become Catholic) into the Church as they celebrate the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist).

Pray It!

Praying with the Seasons

The best way to pray with the Church's seasons is to participate in daily Mass. Also try some of the following seasonal prayers and practices:

Advent

Help your family set up an Advent wreath at home and light one more candle each week.

Christmas

Each day after Christmas, choose a Christmas card your family has received and pray for its sender.

Ordinary Time

Choose a Scripture reading from the next Sunday's liturgy to pray with and to focus on as you prepare for Sunday Mass.

Lent

Give up something for Lent, and choose one way to give during Lent. Each week do something positive, individually or with others, to help those in need.

Easter

Go to the Easter Vigil! (The vigil fulfills the Sunday obligation, but think about going to the Sunday celebration as well. It's Easter!) Each day of the Easter season (until Pentecost), find one way to bring joy to a person in your life.

Pentecost and Ordinary Time

Make plans to share the gifts the Holy Spirit has given you, especially during the summer.

Easter Season

On *Easter Sunday* we continue our celebration of Christ's Resurrection in all its splendor, with the fullest joy. Easter Sunday begins an entire week of celebration, for each day of Easter week, like Easter Sunday itself, is celebrated as a solemnity of the Lord. Easter Sunday also marks the beginning of the Easter season, a fifty-day period that ends on Pentecost. The season's liturgical color is white or gold. During this time the liturgical readings focus on the Risen Jesus and on the growth of the Church in the Acts of the Apostles. In the northern hemisphere, the season of Easter coincides with spring. (The word *Easter* is a form of the name of the goddess Estre, the Greek goddess of spring.) The liturgy and the world itself speak of new life, and the evidence is all around us. Death has been overcome by life, the life of the Risen Christ. His Resurrection is the pledge of our own—that our own personal lives and the lives of our loved ones will never end. Because of Christ's Resurrection, we live with the hope that one day we will be united with God in Heaven forever.

At Pentecost the coming of the Holy Spirit seals the work of Jesus Christ in our lives and reminds us of all that Jesus has taught us. At Pentecost we join the Apostles, the disciples, and the Mother of the Lord in the Upper Room and together we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. With the disciples of Jesus, we are sent into the crowds to proclaim God's salvation in Jesus Christ and to help carry out his mission of love for all humankind. †



© Saint Mary's Press / Mara Fenske

Article 4 Liturgical Rites and Traditions

A bell clangs in the morning air, inviting you to walk through the doors into a small church. Most of the assembly is standing in prayer, although some people are lighting candles at the front. In the dim light, a deacon carrying a smoking censer walks around the entire space, incensing the icons on the walls. You look for the altar, but instead you see a wall of icons. Suddenly, the chandelier above you bursts

into light. The middle doors open, and the deacon emerges. He turns and faces the open doors, through which the priest can now be seen, facing the altar. The deacon sings out, “Bless, Master!”

The priest sings in reply, “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.” The choir and people sing “Amen” in response.

The Ambrosian Rite

The Ambrosian Rite is named after Saint Ambrose, who was bishop of Milan, Italy, in the fourth century. It is celebrated today by approximately five million people in the Archdiocese of Milan and surrounding areas. At the time of the Second Vatican Council, this rite was in danger of being suppressed, but due to the sympathetic influence of Pope Paul VI (a former archbishop of Milan) the Ambrosian Rite was reformed and has survived.

Let's compare the Ambrosian Rite to the Roman Rite. In the Ambrosian Mass, the entrance procession pauses in the middle of the nave (the middle aisle) for the singing of the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) twelve times. For most of the Mass, the altar servers stand in front of the altar, facing it, until they are needed. The priest washes his hands immediately before the consecration, not at the Preparation of the Gifts, as in the Roman Rite. There is no *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God). During Lent a litany is sung in place of the *Gloria*. Passion (Palm) Sunday, which begins Holy Week, is called Olive Sunday, because olive branches are more accessible in Italy than are palms.



A bishop of the Eastern Catholic Church blesses the assembly with the dikerion (double-branched) and trikerion (triple-branched) candlesticks. Behind him is the iconostasis (icon-screen) and altar table.



© Saint Elias Ukrainian Catholic Church, Brampton, Ontario, Canada / www.saintelias.com / Andrei Komar

You are now a little confused. You were told that this was a Catholic Church! And it is. It is one of the twenty-one **Eastern Catholic Churches**, which, after the schism of 1054, either chose to remain united with the Catholic Church or later reunited with it. To this day each Eastern Catholic Church follows its own ancient tradition, with its own bishops, liturgical language, and liturgical customs. All of these Churches, with the Roman Catholic Church, make up twenty-two Churches united under the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. These Eastern Churches celebrate the liturgy according to one of these various liturgical rites: the Antiochene Rite, the Chaldean Rite, the Byzantine Rite, the Alexandrian (Coptic or Ethiopian) Rite, or the Armenian Rite.

Within the Catholic Church can also be found other Latin Rites (besides the Roman Rite), which are celebrated in various places, according to ancient customs. Of course the Roman Rite is celebrated by most of the Roman (Latin) Church. These other Latin Rites celebrated alongside the Roman Rite are the Ambrosian Rite (in and around Milan, Italy); the Mozarabic Rite (in the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Toledo, Spain, and six surrounding parishes); the Bragan Rite (in the Archdiocese of Braga, Portugal); and three rites associated with religious orders: the Dominican, the Carmelite, and the Carthusian Rites.

All of these diverse rites, in both the East and the West, are legitimate expressions of the liturgy of the universal

Catholic Church. They all make present the saving power of God and the saving mysteries of Christ. Because they make present and express the same mystery of Christ, they show us that the Catholic Church is truly catholic (universal). Therefore, even in diversity, the Church remains one body. This is because we follow the teachings of Christ as we have received them from the Apostles and their successors, the bishops. Our unity, in the midst of the diversity of rites, is assured by Apostolic Succession. †

Article 5 Celebrating the Liturgy

The first World Youth Day was instituted on December 20, 1985, at the request of the late Pope John Paul II. Since then convocations of youth have been held in Rome and also in several cities and countries around the world—cities like Buenos Aires, Argentina; Denver, Colorado; Manila, Philippines; and Paris, France. Pope Benedict XVI hosted World Youth Day in 2005 in Cologne, Germany, and in 2008, over 300,000 young people traveled to Sydney, Australia, for the worldwide meeting. For the meeting in Madrid, Spain, in 2011, the Spanish capital hosted 1.5 million young people! In 2014, Pope Francis, a native of South America, will lead the celebration of World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Unquestionably, a liturgy with the Pope and 1.5 million young people would probably be the most exciting and wonderful liturgy imaginable. Yet, in essence, this liturgy is no different than the liturgy available to you every Sunday morning (or Saturday night).

How can this be? How can a liturgy celebrated by the Pope and attended by so many people be the same as one that is celebrated in our parish churches every day? It is the same because Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. It is Jesus Christ whom we encounter in every liturgy, no matter if there is music or not, if there are crowds of people or just a few, or if it is celebrated in a great cathedral, a stadium, or a small chapel. Jesus Christ died and rose for us, and it is always he whom we meet in the liturgy.

That being said, the Church, through its documents and directives, encourages all of her members to help make the liturgy as beautiful and as meaningful as possible. We can-



Eastern Catholic Churches

The twenty-one Churches of the East, with their own theological, liturgical, and administrative traditions, in union with the universal Catholic Church and her head, the Bishop of Rome.



© Bill Wittman / www.pwittman.com

Looked at from the outside, like a movie, liturgy can seem boring at times. But by putting your faith and your heart into it, the liturgy becomes the true story of your life in Christ. How can you prepare for your next episode?

1. Make every effort to be present and accounted for, mentally and spiritually as well as physically. Prepare in advance by examining your conscience in light of the Word of God. Once Mass begins, pay attention to what is going on.
2. Pray to the Holy Spirit. We have learned that the role of the Holy Spirit is to help us fully participate in the liturgy. Ask him to help you to focus and to give thanks for Jesus Christ and for all the good things in your life.
3. Listen to the prayers. In some cases, they have survived thousands of years. Put yourself in the prayers. Find their value.

not be satisfied with the minimum needed for a celebration. We must make every effort to make the liturgy the best it can be.

But what if you are not on the parish liturgical committee or in the choir? How can you contribute to the celebration of the liturgy? Let us speak particularly of the Eucharist for the moment, as that is the Sacrament we celebrate most frequently and the one that unites us in a special way with Christ and with others. Consider these ways to contribute:

Live It!

Step Up to the Liturgy

Every liturgy is not, humanly speaking, perfect. Our human efforts at perfection often falter. This does not diminish the saving power of the Holy Trinity that we encounter in every Sacrament. But we do want every liturgy to be a beautiful sign of Christ's presence with us. A liturgy that seems ill-prepared can discourage and distract us. But as members of the Body of Christ, we can help. Perhaps the choir needs a few more members to sound as good as it could be. Perhaps a few more good readers are needed to proclaim the first and second readings with energy and clarity. Maybe your parish needs Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ during the Liturgy of the Eucharist or a few more reliable parishioners to carry the Body and Blood of Christ to those who are homebound. Step up! Take your place in the work of the liturgy and participate in the work of God.

World Youth Day

World Youth Day is celebrated on a diocesan level every year, usually on Passion Sunday. The Pope welcomes youth to Rome in a special way on that day. In some years World Youth Day is celebrated internationally and is held in a chosen city outside Rome, usually in the summer, to enable more youth to participate. World Youth Day has been celebrated in the following cities and years since the first one in Rome in 1986: Buenos Aires, Argentina (1987); Santiago de Compostela, Spain (1989); Czestochowa, Poland (1991); Denver, Colorado, USA (1993); Manila, Philippines (1995); Paris, France (1997); Toronto, Canada (2002); Cologne, Germany (2005); Sydney, Australia (2008); Madrid, Spain (2011).

On the first World Youth Day in Rome, Pope John Paul II gave the young people a large wooden cross, which has since been taken “on pilgrimage” to every World Youth Day international gathering. In 2003 he gave an icon of Mary to the World Youth Day gathering. When the cross and icon are not displayed at World Youth Day gatherings, they are kept in the San Lorenzo Youth Center in Rome.



© Bill Witman / www.witman.com

4. Listen to the readings. Try (with the help of the Holy Spirit) to allow the words to touch your mind and heart.
5. Pray during the General Intercessions. Pray for the Church, the world, and those who suffer. Pray for your family and friends. Pray for yourself, particularly if you are going through a challenging time.
6. Sing. Music opens up our hearts and our spirits. It opens us up to God. As Saint Augustine said, “He who sings prays twice.” There is no need for embarrassment or pride. We do not sing at the Eucharist to show off our voices but rather to give glory to God with whatever voice he gave us!

7. Say the responses and think about the meaning of the words you say.
8. Use your body. When you make the Sign of the Cross, make it thoughtfully. When you kneel, hold yourself up straight. When you stand or walk, stand up straight. Our bodies help us to pray when we truly participate in the action asked of us.
9. When you receive Communion, concentrate on the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharistic species and the gift of grace you are receiving, which gives you strength to lead a moral life.
10. When you are dismissed from Mass, resolve to go forth to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Strive to do what is good and avoid what is evil. This includes carrying out works of mercy, loving actions that help others with their physical and spiritual needs.

The liturgy is a two-way street: God communicates with us and we communicate with him. Communication is difficult if one of us (and guess which one that might be) is missing in action! ✚

Part Review

1. What is the original meaning of the word *liturgy*?
2. What does the Church mean by the word *liturgy*?
3. What is the Magisterium of the Church?
4. What is Tradition?
5. What does it mean when we say that the Church's liturgy is Trinitarian?
6. How are we in union with the Trinity?
7. What is the liturgical year?
8. How does the Holy Spirit help us to celebrate the liturgy?
9. Explain why every liturgy is a participation in, and anticipation of, the heavenly liturgy.

Sacraments

If you are like most Catholics, the Sacraments have been part of your life for as long as you can remember. You probably don't remember your Baptism, but you will probably never forget the excitement of your First Communion! If you've celebrated Confirmation, you have had the opportunity to affirm the faith you were given as a gift in Baptism and to receive the fullness of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

But you may have questions about these and the other Sacraments. Where did they come from? How do they work? Why do we have them? These are excellent questions, because they keep us from taking the great gift of the Sacraments, "God's masterpieces" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 1091), for granted.

In this part we approach the Sacraments from with a wide-angle lens. We look first at symbols and rituals in general. Then we apply those concepts to the Sacraments as signs of Christ's presence in the Church. Next we explore the Sacraments as active signs of grace and redemption for us. Last we take a look at the praying Church, including sacramentals and popular expressions of faith, as a help to our relationship with God and to our everyday Christian living.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 6: Symbols and Rituals (page 32)
- Article 7: Sacraments: Sign and Mystery (page 35)
- Article 8: Sacraments: Signs of Christ (page 38)
- Article 9: Sacraments: Signs of Redemption (page 43)
- Article 10: The Praying Church (page 46)

Article 6 Symbols and Rituals

We use symbols and rituals every day, almost without realizing it. In this article we discuss some of these everyday symbols and then apply our understanding to the symbols and rituals of the Sacraments. One good example of a set of symbols we use every day is language. When people have a shared language, they have a shared understanding of what words mean. If we share the meanings of words, we can communicate our thoughts and ideas. Through language we can turn what is within us (our thoughts and feelings) into something outside of us that can affect or influence others. It is hard to imagine how different our lives would be without language.

Yet, however wonderful language is, sometimes words are not enough. Where our deepest thoughts and feelings are concerned, we all sometimes need to be *shown* the meaning of words. And this is not a bad attitude to have. Saint John, the beloved disciple of Christ, wrote to his community in the first century, “Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18). Love is a verb. Love is not only thinking and feeling but also *doing*.

Making Symbols, Doing Rituals

Because we have a need to act out our deepest thoughts and feelings, we are natural-born symbol-makers and ritual-doers. On Valentine’s Day, saying “I love you” is not enough for us. We want to share something tangible like a card and flowers or a box of candy. When we meet someone, we use both words and gestures (a handshake or another kind of ritual) to show our friendliness. When we have finished a course of studies, we could just receive a certificate in the mail that says our studies are complete, but instead we have a graduation ceremony, complete with songs, speeches, invited guests, and a personal handing over of a beautifully printed diploma (probably with a handshake as well). Words are not always enough. We are human. We need action. We need symbols and rituals to act out what we really mean.



© Eric Thompson / iStockphoto.com

A sign conveys one message: Go. Stop. This Way Out. A symbol conveys a web of meaning, often without words. Think of some symbols we often see and use that convey deep meaning.

Symbols and Rituals Defined

Symbols and rituals are related, but they are not exactly the same thing. The word **symbol** comes from a Greek word meaning “to throw together.” A symbol “throws together” the literal meaning of an object or action with other meanings that it evokes. For example, in the Sacrament of Baptism, water is water. It is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen. But it also evokes other meanings, like washing, cleansing, and purifying. Thus water becomes a symbol of something more than itself. The symbol of water invites us to look beyond the liquid to its deeper meanings.

A **ritual** is an established pattern of actions, usually including words. The words and actions have symbolic meaning, so “symbolic action” is another way to refer to a ritual. Rituals can be simple, like a handshake, or a wave, or the Sign of the Cross. They can also be more complex, such as the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games or the inauguration of a president. Because the liturgy and the Sacraments involve symbols with words and actions, we call them *rituals*.



symbol

An object or action that points us to another reality. It leads us to look beyond our senses to consider a deeper mystery.

ritual

The established form of the words and actions for a ceremony that is repeated often. The actions often have a symbolic meaning.

Sacraments, Symbols, and Rituals

Why are we symbol-makers and ritual-doers? Because God made us this way. When God communicates with us, he does not use words alone. And when we respond to him, we do not use words alone. One of God’s best ways of communicating with us is through liturgical celebrations, especially the Sacraments. And our participation in the Sacraments is one of the best ways we can respond to him. †

Catholic Wisdom

Julian of Norwich (1342—c. 1416) was an anchoress (a solitary nun) in England. Her teachings are simple but profound. Here is an example:

For as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, so are we, soul and body, clad and enclosed in the goodness of God. Yes, and more closely. . . . There is no created being who can know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly the Creator loves us.” (*Julian of Norwich: Showings*, page 186)

Rituals in Our Lives

We have already discussed some symbols we use in our ordinary lives. Here are some other examples of symbol and ritual at work:

Happy Birthday! The ritual elements of a birthday celebration are almost unvarying: a birthday cake, candles, the singing of a song of good wishes. The eating of the cake (or variation thereof) is particularly important, because eating together is a symbol of sharing our lives. This symbol of sharing and solidarity is so meaningful that often pieces of cake are saved for those who cannot be present, or sent with others to bring to them. The message is: "You are one with us."

Walking rituals Some cultures and traditions, including our Catholic tradition, use walking as a ritual. Walking together is an expression of solidarity. It is a symbol of the journey of life and that we do not walk alone on this journey. Walking together is also meditative and prayerful. In a procession or a pilgrimage, there is a movement forward, but it is at a human pace, providing time for reflection and prayer along the way.

In our Catholic liturgy, we often use processions (walking together) to enter or leave our worship space, and to move around within it. For example, we may have a short procession before the reading of the Gospel and at the Presentation of the Gifts. We approach the receiving of Communion in procession. Processions have been a popular way for the community of faith to celebrate a feast or a saint and to pray together. Pilgrimages to holy places remain popular, though often the pilgrims ride in cars or on buses. The pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint James of Compostela, in Spain, has been famous since the ninth century. Serious pilgrims still make this journey across northern Spain on foot.



Article

7 Sacraments: Sign and Mystery

The Sacraments are signs of God's love. They are signs of his presence in our lives. They are rituals, instituted by Christ and handed down to us through Scripture and Tradition, by which God gives us his very life of grace. In order to appreciate their richness and to define the meaning of *Sacrament*, we need to define a few related terms.

The first term is *sign*. In everyday language, *sign* has a definite and limited meaning. A red, eight-sided sign with the letters S-T-O-P written on it means "stop."

This command is its entire meaning. A sign pointing down a road to a nearby town says "To Riverdale." The sign gives you directions to Riverdale.

However, when we say that "a Sacrament is a sign of God's love," we mean that this sign, this Sacrament, is much more than a pointer or a command. The word *sign* in this instance means "symbol," a sign that points beyond itself, a sign that invites us to consider the deeper meaning present within it.

The words *sign* and *symbol* have shaped our understanding of the Sacraments for centuries. In the Gospel of John, the miracles of Jesus are called *signs*, not because they are commands or directions, but because they point to a deeper reality: that God is here among us. The Gospel account of the miracle at Cana, when Jesus turned water into wine, ends with, "Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him" (John 2:11). Though the Sacraments are different from Jesus' miracles, they are signs because they call us to faith in a deeper reality: God is here among us. They are signs through which Christ acts sacramentally to bring about what they signify: They communicate to us the grace of Christ and bring us into deeper relationship with him.

Sacrament and Mystery

In the fifth century, when the New Testament was translated from its original Greek into the then-common language of Latin, the Greek word for *sign* was translated into *sacramentum*. It is from this word that we get our English word *Sacrament*. In the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Sacraments

© iStockphoto / Shutterstock.com



Explain the difference between this arrow as a sign and a Sacrament as a sign.

How Do the Sacraments Work?

We have already seen that the Sacraments work because God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is at work in them. Through the centuries, questions arose as to the validity of the Sacraments under various circumstances. Is it “better” to receive a Sacrament from a priest known to be holy? Are people really baptized or married if the priest is not as holy as he could be? What if the recipients are not known for their overall goodness—do the Sacraments still work for them? These kinds of questions were pondered by scholars and theologians until finally the Council of Trent, in 1547, declared that the Sacraments act *ex opere operato*—literally, “by the work worked,” or, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* translates, “by the very fact of the action’s being performed” (1128). In this the Council of Trent agreed with the statement of Saint Thomas Aquinas: “The sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God” (*Summa Theologica* III, 68, 8).

None of us is in a position to judge another person’s holiness or “righteousness” or closeness to God. The power of Christ and the Holy Spirit acts in the Sacraments independently of the personal holiness of the person administering the Sacrament. Grace can neither be seen nor quantified; each of the Sacraments works whether we feel it or not. However, the fruits (or effects) of the Sacrament do depend on the faith of the one who receives it.

At the words of consecration, bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This is the “mystery of faith” that we proclaim at every Eucharist.

© P. Deliss / Godong / Corbis

are called mysteries. This puts focus on the Sacraments as the means by which we enter into the greatest mystery: the mystery of Christ. Through the Sacraments, or mysteries, we encounter Christ’s life-giving presence in our lives.

The core of every Sacrament is the **Paschal Mystery** of Christ—his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven—and his promise to be with us always. (You may recall that *Paschal* refers to Passover, when the angel *passed over* the houses of the Israelites and spared their firstborn sons, and, centuries later, when Jesus, the Son of God, *passed over* from death to life, and spared us from eternal death.) The Paschal Mystery is most evident in the Eucharist, when we offer bread and wine and receive it back, by the words and actions of the priest and by the power of the Holy Spirit, as Christ’s own Body and Blood, given up for us.



Yet in every Sacrament, we die with Christ by letting go of some of our “former selves” (the stubborn, sniping, or indifferent selves) and come to a new risen life with him by embracing in faith the life of grace and love he offers us. In every Sacrament, in every one of these signs of God’s love, we enter into the mystery of Christ’s death and Resurrection and then allow him to enter into our lives so that we may repeat this “trustworthy” saying of the early Christians:

If we have died with him
 we shall also live with him;
 if we persevere
 we shall also reign with him.
 (2 Timothy 2:11–12)

The Sacraments Are . . .

Understanding the meaning of *sign*, *symbol*, *sacrament*, and *mystery*, we can now approach the exact definition of a **Sacrament**:

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. (CCC, 1131)

Let us break apart this definition. First, the Sacraments are *efficacious* signs. This means that they are *effective* and that they actually *work*, because Christ is at work in them. They are not empty words and gestures but words and gestures that carry with them the power of God.

The Sacraments are signs of *grace*. Grace is not a “thing” we get but a relationship with God that we are *in*. Grace is divine favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us in order that we might become his adopted children and share his divine life.

The Sacraments were *instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church*. The Sacraments originate in Christ. This does not mean that he dictated the particular words and gestures that are part of every Sacrament. But, as we look at Christ, we see him at work—healing, forgiving, giving of himself in the Eucharist. That work, by his will and power, has been entrusted to the Church in the Sacraments. Through the Sacraments, Christ works in his people today.



Paschal Mystery

The work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ mainly through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

Sacrament

An efficacious and visible sign of God’s grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The Seven Sacraments are Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders.



sacramental economy

The communication or dispensation of the fruits of Christ's Paschal Mystery in the celebration of the Church's sacramental liturgy.

The visible rites (the symbols and rituals) by which the Sacraments are celebrated *signify (symbolize) and make present* the graces that belong to each Sacrament. We will take a closer look at the symbols and rituals as we study each individual Sacrament.

The Sacraments bear fruit in those who receive them with the *required dispositions*. A Sacrament gains us entry into the mystery of Christ, the life of grace and love. But we need to have the required disposition. That disposition is an attitude of faith. How much faith? Jesus said that faith the size of a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, is enough (see Luke 17:6). Jesus takes us as we are and brings us, with him, to where he wants us to be.

There are Seven Sacraments. The *Sacraments of Christian Initiation* are Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The *Sacraments of Healing* are Penance and Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. The *Sacraments at the Service of Communion* are Holy Orders and Matrimony. †

Article 8 Sacraments: Signs of Christ

Did you ever think of Jesus Christ as a Sacrament? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the great sign of God's love for us and of how we are to love God. God sent his Son as the culmination of a long history of salvific events that have revealed his presence and actions. The sending of his Son into the world is his final Revelation and eternal intervention in human history. In "Eucharistic Prayer IV," this history (called *salvation history*) and its culmination in Jesus Christ is briefly outlined:

We give you praise, Father most holy,
for you are great
and you have fashioned all your works
in wisdom and love.
You formed man in your own image . . .
And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship,
you did not abandon him to the domain of death. . . .
And you so loved the world, Father most holy,
that in the fullness of time
you sent your Only Begotten Son to be our Savior.

(*Roman Missal*, "Eucharistic Prayer IV")

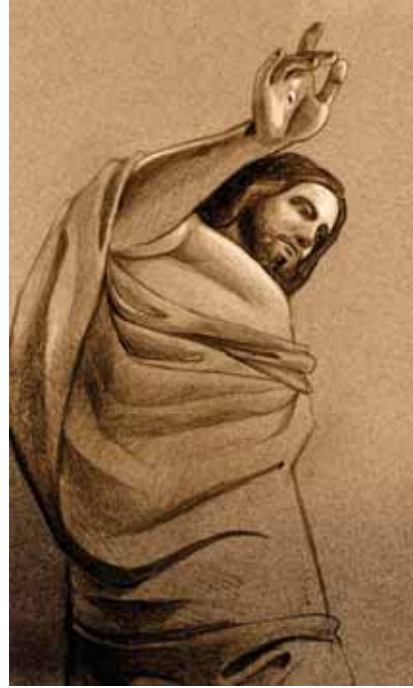
In this article we review the meaning of this great gift of Jesus Christ and the ways he continues to save us today, especially through the Sacraments of the Church. For Jesus is the Father's final answer to our sin and suffering. When the Word became flesh and God became man, the world changed. Even those who kept the Old Law to the best of their ability would find new life in Jesus. As the Apostle John wrote: "While the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him" (John 1:17–18). We sometimes call Jesus the Original Sacrament because he is the most basic way we encounter God and is the ultimate sign of God's love.

The Sacramental Economy

Christ commissioned the Church to carry on his work, to carry on his very presence in the world, through the Sacraments. The Eucharist is the primary Sacrament through which Christ enters our lives, but all the Sacraments *signify and make present* the work of Christ in our lives, through grace. This is called the **sacramental economy**.

We are all familiar with the monetary system, the economy that runs on money. Through work (physical or intellectual), we make goods and services. We sell our goods and services to others. We get money, and then we spend our money on other goods and services that other people offer. This is how our economy works. We do not trade or barter. We receive and spend money as a substitute for trading and bartering. In this way we can provide ourselves and others with everything we need to live. Under ordinary circumstances, in order to eat, to clothe ourselves, to have shelter, to live, we must be in the flow of money. Without money, we are stuck. (It is said that money is a good servant but a terrible master.)

The sacramental economy runs on grace. Try to remember that grace is not a thing; rather, grace is a relationship with God and a participation in his life. So it is not *exactly*



© Jon Perry/iStockphoto.com

In the Sacraments, we encounter the Risen Christ. Jesus enters our hearts and our lives, to heal us and to guide us. A Sacrament is a meeting with Jesus Christ himself.



sanctifying grace

The grace that heals our human nature wounded by sin and restores us to friendship with God by giving us a share in the divine life of the Trinity. It is a supernatural gift of God, infused into our souls by the Holy Spirit, that continues the work of making us holy.

actual graces

God's interventions and support for us in the everyday moments of our lives. Actual graces are important for conversion and for continuing growth in holiness.

like money. That being said, other comparisons work. In order to live, to share God's life, to participate in the mystery of Christ, we must be in the flow of grace. Without grace, without God's life, we are stuck.

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we were adopted as God's sons and daughters, and we have been living "in grace" (as long as we have steered clear of mortal sin) since that moment. Grace has made us God's children and, in Christ, has brought us into the life of the Trinity.

What Is Grace?

Sanctifying grace is the free gift of God's life, first given to us at Baptism and renewed in us in all the Sacraments. Sanctifying grace orients us toward God. We might say it "tilts us" in his direction. It helps us to live according to his call. Through the Holy Spirit, sanctifying grace heals our souls of sin and makes us holy.

Sanctifying grace gives us a permanent disposition that enables us to live with God. This type of grace is distinct from **actual graces**, which are God's interventions in our lives. His initiative in the work of grace both prepares us to respond and demands that we respond, but it does not limit our freedom. Instead grace "responds to the deepest yearnings of human freedom, calls freedom to cooperate with it, and perfects freedom" (CCC, 2022).

Freedom

When we freely respond to and cooperate with God, we open ourselves to even more grace and more freedom. We sometimes imagine that sin will make us free or happy. "If I could only do *that*," we think, "I'd really feel good. I'd really be free and happy!" But this could not be further from the truth. True happiness and true freedom come from responding to grace.

For example, imagine you have a friend who struggles with math, but math comes fairly easily to you. You suggest that you could help. After only one tutoring session, your friend is beginning to get it and is so grateful for your help! You feel good. You feel happy. Whose idea was this to help your friend? God's. Who gave you "the gift of math" so that you *could* help your friend? God. Who helped you to say yes

Amazing Grace

The popular hymn “Amazing Grace” was written by an Englishman, a former sea captain and slave trader named John Newton (1725–1807). Newton wrote the song from personal experience. He was not a religious man, and his life was a series of misadventures. Eventually he became a sailor and then a slave trader. He was notorious for his profanity, his insubordination, his mockery of believers, and his denunciations of God. One night, a terrible storm battered his vessel. Exhausted, with the rest of the crew, from hours of bailing water, and expecting to be capsized, Newton called out, “Lord, have mercy upon us!” This was the beginning of his conversion. He began to think about his life and his relationship with God. A few years later, he quit the sea and began to study theology.

Ordained in the Church of England, Newton wrote the verses to “Amazing Grace” for a prayer meeting on New Year’s Day in 1773. The song caught on in the United States, especially among African Americans. During the twentieth century, the song’s popularity surged.

Here are the words of the first verse of the hymn:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

These words have been directly related to verses in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:32) and in the healing of the man born blind (see John 9:25). For John Newton, as for all who are open to it, God’s grace brings salvation and leads from darkness to light.



to the idea of helping? God. You responded to grace, and if you continue to respond to grace, you will freely choose to help your friends, and others, in the future.

Doorways to Life

Without this flow of God's life, grace, we are stuck. But we have hope because Christ founded the Church to be the ordinary channel of his grace, his life, for his followers. Christ wants to be accessible and available through the Church and the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, in which he is really and substantially present. This was his plan of *salvation* for us. We need not be stuck in our sin. Through the Sacraments we were given a door, a way in, to the life of grace, the life of relationship with God. This life is what we are made for. It is only through God that we are able to live a fully human life and find true happiness.

The Church communicates the grace she signifies and so we can say that the Church is a sacrament. She is the sign and instrument of communion between God and human beings, and the means of bringing about that communion. Thus the Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation. All salvation comes from Christ through the Church.

The coming of Christ to live among us was not a one-time event. It is an all-time event that continues through the Church. Being a sacrament of the communion of human beings and God also means that the Church is the sign of unity among all people. As Jesus said, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Jesus intended the Church, which

includes all who are members of the Body of Christ, to be that sign of love. He intended the Sacraments to be those doorways to divine life, open to all people of all times and in all places. †

From the circle of Jesus and the Apostles, the Church has expanded to circle the world. Like a circle, it expands without losing its shape or its identity. It is the sacrament of God's love and salvation, welcoming all.

© Andresr / Shutterstock.com



Article

9 Sacraments: Signs of Redemption

We do not often use the word *redeem* in ordinary life, but it has its moments. We *redeem* coupons at a store. We might say something like, “This old table was *redeemed* from the scrap heap,” or “This afternoon I am going to the dry cleaner to *redeem* my shirts.” What can we learn from these uses of the word *redeem*?

The Cross: Symbol of Redemption

In Roman times crucifixion was common. It was a cruel way of keeping order in the far-flung provinces of the Roman Empire. Basically, crucifixion was death by torture, a little at a time. It was a horrible way to die. Eventually, with the passage of time and with reflection upon the events of the Paschal Mystery, the cross, an instrument of death, became a sign of new life. Depictions of Jesus nailed to the cross, based on scriptural accounts, began to appear in Christian devotion and art.

This passage from the Gospel of John recounts that both blood and water flowed from the side of Christ as he died: “One soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may [come to] believe” (19:34–35). The footnote in the New American Bible states that this emphasis may be John’s way of showing the reality of Jesus’ death, and that the blood and the water may be a symbolic reference to the Eucharist (blood) and Baptism (water).

What a graphic and beautiful way to show us that the Sacraments flow from the heart of Christ and that they put us in direct contact with his life and love!



redemption

From the Latin *redemptio*, meaning “a buying back”; referring, in the Old Testament, to Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel and, in the New Testament, to Christ’s deliverance of all Christians from the forces of sin.

Generally, we can say that *to redeem* something implies taking something from one state of being to another. A coupon is just another piece of paper until we *redeem* it and get some value in return. An old table is doomed until someone with a good eye *redeems* it and makes it useful and valuable again. Shirts will stay at the dry cleaner forever unless their owner comes and *redeems* them—gets them back to his closet, where they belong.

The word *redeem* comes from a Latin word meaning “to buy back” or “to purchase.” Meanings for the word *redemption* include “deliverance” or “rescue.” At the time of Jesus, this is exactly what the People of God were looking for. They were a conquered people, being ruled by the Romans. Their great faith in God, which had led them from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, was disintegrating, little by little, into a tissue of legalisms that were just as oppressive, in their own way, as the political oppression of the Romans. It was at this point in time that God chose to send his Son into the world as its rescuer, its deliverer, and its redeemer.

As Jesus himself said, he did not come to destroy the Old Law but to fulfill it. When people were tithing their harvests of herbs and spices to give one tenth to the Temple, as the Law directed, he did not object. He commended them. But he also warned them not to neglect the bigger things, like mercy and fidelity. Jesus accused the leaders of being blind guides who were straining out gnats but swallowing camels (see Matthew 23:23–24)!

The People of God at the time of Jesus definitely needed **redemption**. They needed to be brought back to the truth about God and about themselves. They needed to be brought back into a graced relationship with God and freed from the burden of the sin. So that was the mission of Jesus: to conquer sin and death, to redeem his People, to bring them back to God, in freedom and in truth.

So what about us? Are love and faithfulness gaining ground in our time, in our lives? Are we concentrating on the bigger things in our lives and in our world? Or are we straining out gnats and swallowing camels too? You may have heard the saying “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” Keep the



bigger picture—what life is really about—in mind. How are you doing on that?

Fortunately for us, the teachings of Jesus and his work of redemption did not die in the tomb. His work of redemption reaches people of all times and all places.

The Paschal Mystery (the Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ) happened in history, but it transcends history because it never ends. When Christ rose from the dead, he destroyed death. He conquered sin. We could also say that he destroyed “time” as we know it because in his Resurrection he transcended time. Christ drew everything, including time, into his risen life.

In Christ, time became eternal. Christ is present in all time—the past, the present, and the future. He can meet us in our time, in the liturgy, especially in the Sacraments, because he lives forever in eternity. And that is not all. When we participate in the liturgy, we step into Christ’s eternity. We share his eternal life. We are no longer time-bound to this day or this year. Our present and our future are safe with him, now and forever. We are brought back to God, in time and in eternity, where we belong. We are *redeemed*. †

Pray It!

The Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is an ancient way of praying that comes to us from the prayer practice of the Eastern Churches. The prayer itself is this: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The prayer honors the name of Jesus, asks his mercy, and reminds us that we must come before God in truth and in humility. We admit that we are not perfect human beings, but we want to try our best, and we trust that God forgives when we are sorry for our sins.

This prayer is rooted in the Gospels and echoes verses from three New Testament books: Philippians (2:6–11), Mark (10:46–52), and Luke (18:13). You might like to look up these verses and consider the Jesus Prayer in this wider Gospel context.

Take some time, perhaps once each day, to say the Jesus Prayer. You will be connecting with a long tradition of prayer, and you will be making room in your mind, your heart, and your life for Jesus Christ, Son of the living God.

Article 10 The Praying Church

Do you have a favorite place to pray? It need not be a physical place. It can be somewhere in your imagination. Take time to go there often.



© Lynne Carpenter / Shutterstock.com

If you have ever watched waves crash upon a beach and then recede, in a beautiful and mysterious rhythm, you have some idea of the reciprocal relationship of prayer. “Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man” (CCC, 2591). God is always calling each of us to this mysterious encounter with him. His call surges into our lives, sometimes like a wave’s mighty crash or quiet ripple, and then recedes, giving us time and space to respond. When we do, prayer unfolds, in our lives and in the Church.

In this article we discuss the prayer of the Church, beginning with the official liturgical prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Then we explore both communal and private prayer, and the various forms that prayer may take in our lives. We end with the three major kinds of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplation.

The Liturgy of the Hours



Liturgy of the Hours

Also known as the Divine Office, the official, public, daily prayer of the Catholic Church. The Divine Office provides standard prayers, Scripture readings, and reflections at regular hours throughout the day.

As we have learned, there is no greater prayer than the liturgy, the public prayer of the Church. In the liturgy we lift up our hearts to the Lord as we pray in the name of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Liturgy of the Hours, prayer designated for certain hours of the day, is part of the public prayer of the Church. The **Liturgy of the Hours** originated with the Jewish practice of meeting several times a day for prayer. The first Jewish Christians continued this practice as they met daily in the Temple (see Acts of the Apostles 2:46). This practice evolved into the basic structure of the Liturgy of the Hours we know today: an opening hymn, psalm, a reading from Scripture, the Lord’s Prayer, and the prayer of the day from the liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the whole people of God. It is prayed (or chanted in the ancient melodies of Gregorian chant) most completely by the contemplative orders of the Church. The ordained members of the Church are also obliged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours each day. Laypeople are also encouraged to pray on a regular basis and

to include at least the major hours (Morning and Evening Prayer) in their daily prayer. This is, of course, in addition to the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist and the feasts of the liturgical year. If there is a monastery or convent of monks or nuns near you, it would be worthwhile to visit them and pray with them. In the Liturgy of the Hours, the entire Church prays in the Holy Spirit and opens its heart to God.

Communal and Private Prayer

When we pray outside of liturgy, either alone or with others, our **prayer** is a small, quiet stream flowing into the great river of living waters, the liturgical prayer of the Church. When we raise our minds and hearts to God (see CCC, 2559), we do so as individuals, yet as members of Christ's Body. United with Christ in Baptism, we are heard as beloved children of God in Christ. United with others in prayer, we have been assured by Jesus himself that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). And when we pray alone, we are not really alone, because we are in communion with Christ and with the Church (see Ephesians 3:18–21).

Some ways we pray with others spring from particular cultures or local traditions. These expressions of faith are called "popular piety." *Piety* means religious reverence or devotion. These expressions are called "popular" because they are "of the people." They include customs like novenas (nine days of prayer) requesting the intercession of a saint; processions in honor of Our Lord, Our Lady, or particular saints; and the crowning of a statue of Our Lady during the month of May. Although these popular expressions of faith are not part of the official liturgy, the Church encourages them as long as they express the spirit of the Gospels and offer sound guidance in living a Christian life.

Thérèse was a young nun in a Carmelite monastery in France. After her death, her writings were circulated. Saint Thérèse (1873–1897), now recognized as a Doctor of the Church, taught "Do little things out of great love."



prayer

Lifting up of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from him. The five basic forms of prayer are blessing, praise, petition, thanksgiving, and intercession. In prayer we communicate with God in a relationship of love.

© François Guenet / Art Resource, NY



Prayer of the Heart

Since ancient times, Christians have practiced “the prayer of the heart.” In the Semitic view, the heart is the center of the body. From the heart springs both good and evil *thinking*, as well as what we call feelings or emotions. Thus, according to the fathers and mothers of the desert (the first monks and nuns), if you can direct and control your thoughts, you can direct and control your heart, your desires, and your prayer.

In simplest terms, “the prayer of the heart” is repeating a phrase—a Scripture verse or a short prayer—over and over again, calmly and sincerely, until it becomes part of you. Some choose a different Scripture verse each day. Others may choose the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Still others choose just one word: “God,” “love,” or “peace.” This prayer becomes our foundation, something we fall back on amid the demands of our lives. For example, you can be listening in class or waiting in a checkout line or stopped at a stoplight, and your prayer word or phrase will come to mind. In this one simple word or phrase, God is reaching out to you and you are reaching out to him.

So try it. In your Scripture verse or prayer word, you will find that God is with you, every minute, every hour, every day of the week.

Personal prayer is a living relationship with God and is essential for a believer and a follower of Christ. No relationship can survive without communication, and that is what prayer is. It may not even need words. Sometimes deep thoughts and feelings are communicated in a glance, a gesture. It is the same with you and God. He knows you, loves you, and can read you like a book. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, a young woman living an obscure life in a Carmelite monastery, described it this way: “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and love, embracing both trial and joy.”

Forms of Prayer

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, various forms of prayer have arisen in the Church: blessing and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. The Holy Spirit continues to teach the Church, recalling all that Jesus

has taught and helping her to pray, inspiring new expressions of these ancient forms.

In prayers of *blessing*, we bless God because he has first blessed us: “Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (Ephesians 1:3). We *adore* God for his greatness, his power, and his holiness. We marvel at his creation, and wonder that he has made us as part of it. In prayers of *petition*, we pray for our needs, most especially our need for forgiveness. We also pray for the coming of the Kingdom, and for what we need to cooperate with the mission of Christ on earth. Through prayers of *intercession*, we pray for the needs of others. We ask on behalf of another, just as Jesus continually intercedes with the Father for us.

In prayers of *thanksgiving*, we acknowledge God as the Creator and thank him for his goodness. The Eucharist is our primary prayer of thanksgiving; from it flows thanksgiving for all of God’s gifts, in every circumstance. Prayers of *praise* erupt in joy and express our love for God, recognizing above all that he is God. Praise “embraces the other forms of prayer” (CCC, 2639), for in it we acknowledge not only what God does but also Who he is—the source and goal of our lives, the One in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts of the Apostles 17:28).

Live It!

Desert Time

The earliest monks and nuns lived in the *desert*. They were following an inner call to seek God and to live the Gospel more closely. In your life, you too may need a “desert time” when you can seek God in prayer and reflection. Here are a few ideas:

1. Take a short time each day to read God’s Word and to meditate on it. Look over the readings for the coming Sunday. Let the Word of God speak to you through them.
2. Use a short form of Morning or Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, and pray with the Church.
3. Choose a Scripture verse for the day or the week.
4. Pray the Rosary.
5. Draw a peaceful scene. Mentally place yourself and Jesus within it. What is Jesus saying to you?
6. Start and keep a “prayer and life journal.” Make up your own prayers.

Sacramentals

Sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church rather than by Christ. They include blessings; actions, such as blessing ourselves with holy water while making the Sign of the Cross; and objects, such as blessed ashes or holy cards. Sacramentals occupy an important place in the life of the Church. They prepare us for the Sacraments and contribute to our holiness, our closeness to God, in varying circumstances of our lives.

Among all sacramentals, blessings come first. The Church blesses persons, meals, objects, and places. Every blessing includes praise of God for his works and gifts. Blessings also lift up the Church's intercessory prayer for us, that we may be able to use God's gifts in the spirit of the Gospel.

Because every baptized person is called both to be a "blessing" and to bless, the Church derives its power to bless from Baptism. In certain circumstances, laypeople can bless: Parents can bless their children, for example. When a blessing concerns Church and sacramental life, it is usually reserved for the ordained—bishops, priests, or deacons. Blessings of certain ministers in the Church, like lectors, altar servers, and catechists, are sacramentals.

Some blessings are consecrations to God, like the blessing of an abbot or an abbess or the rite of religious profession.

Some objects that can be blessed are familiar to us: a crucifix; rosary beads; palms; and holy cards with pictures of Jesus, Mary, or the saints. These objects are also sacramentals. We treat them with respect because they are part of our spiritual inheritance. They are not jewelry or magic. They have no power in themselves, but their power comes from the faith of the Church, which blesses them and offers them to us as helps and supports in our journey to God.



You might evaluate your relationship with God by thinking about these forms of prayer. Are you always petitioning for your needs and hardly ever praising or thanking? Do you bless God and praise him? Consider whether your relationship with God may benefit from a greater variety of prayer.

Three Expressions of Prayer

In the Christian tradition, three major expressions of the life of prayer have come down to us: vocal prayer, mental prayer and meditation, and contemplative prayer.

Vocal prayer uses words to speak to God. The words can be spoken aloud or silently, and we can pray them alone or in a group. Memorized prayers are one kind of vocal prayer. So are prayers you make up yourself. This kind of prayer is also sometimes called spontaneous prayer. You can always use your own words to tell God what you are thinking or feeling.

Meditation uses our thoughts, imagination, and emotions to get in touch with God. In meditation, we can use Scripture, the Rosary, pictures, or creation as ways to focus our minds and hearts on him.

Contemplation, sometimes defined as “resting in God,” is a wordless prayer. It is another way of listening for God’s movement in our lives. It is faith meeting his love in silence. By being silent and peaceful, we enter into union with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We can be open to contemplation, but it is always a gift from God: Eye has not seen nor ear heard “what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). ✚

Part Review

1. How are a symbol and a ritual related?
2. What is a Sacrament?
3. What is the Paschal Mystery?
4. What do we mean by *sacramental economy*?
5. How do the Sacraments fulfill Christ's plan of redemption for us?
6. What is grace?
7. Explain the difference between sanctifying grace and actual grace.
8. Describe each of the three expressions of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplation.
9. What is the Liturgy of the Hours?

Section 2

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Part 1

Part 1

Baptism

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation are the three Sacraments that initiate us into the life of Christ and the life of the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. These three Sacraments begin our lives as followers of Christ. In this section we explore the Sacraments of Baptism (part 1) and Confirmation (part 2). We discuss the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 1324), separately in section 3.

This part’s exploration of Baptism includes discussion of the Sacrament’s scriptural roots and history and provides an overview of two rites the Church follows for Baptism: the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the Rite of Baptism for Children. Along the way you will be encouraged to reflect on the meaning of Baptism in your own life: What does it mean to be baptized? to follow Jesus Christ? to belong to the Church?

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 11: Introduction to Baptism (page 55)
- Article 12: Christian Initiation in the Early Centuries (page 59)
- Article 13: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults I (page 61)
- Article 14: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults II (page 66)
- Article 15: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults III (page 70)
- Article 16: The Rite of Baptism for Children (page 76)
- Article 17: Baptism: The Source of Christian Living (page 82)

Article

11 Introduction to Baptism

The **Sacrament of Baptism**, the first Sacrament of Christian Initiation, is the basis of the entire Christian life. In Baptism we become members of Christ and of the Church, and we also become sharers in her mission to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

The word *Baptism* comes from the Greek word *baptizein*, which means “to plunge.” In Baptism we are plunged into the waters of death in order to rise to new life in Christ.

Baptism is also called “the bath of enlightenment,” for through Baptism we are enlightened by the Word that is Christ and receive “the true light” (John 1:9) that enlightens every follower of Christ.

The next time you witness a Baptism, either in your own family or at a parish celebration, try to think about its meaning as plunging into death in order to rise into life, and as the bath of enlightenment.

The Waters of Life: Creation

The Sacrament of Baptism finds its roots in the Old Testament, the Old Covenant with God, the Old Covenant that Jesus came “not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). These roots begin in the Book of Genesis.

“Since the beginning of the world, water . . . has been the source of life” (CCC, 1218). At the beginning of creation, the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters, breathed on them, and brought life from them (see Genesis 1:1).

This is what the Church remembers at every Baptism: The Holy Spirit hovers over the possibility of every human life, and brings wonderful gifts to fruition in it. In Baptism a human being becomes a new creation in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Great Flood

But water can be deadly. It is a fact that, among all the natural disasters possible in this world, human life is most frequently lost not through earthquakes, fires, or tornadoes, but through flooding. Again, we find in the Book of Genesis a



Baptism, Sacrament of

The first of the Seven Sacraments and one of the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation (the others being Confirmation and the Eucharist) by which one becomes a member of the Church and a new creature in Christ.

© Khoroshunova Olga / Shutterstock.com



Consider your experiences with water, both positive and negative.