

Session 17: Grace and the Sacraments

HYMN: Amazing Grace



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.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to
fear,
and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me;
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils, and
snares
I have already come.
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus
far,
and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand
years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's
praise
than when we'd first begun.

PRAYER: See Eph 1:17-19.

Let us pray: O God,
grant us a spirit
of wisdom and insight
to know You clearly.
Enlighten our innermost vision,
that we may know the great hope
to which You have called us,
the wealth of Your glorious heritage
to be distributed among the members
of the Church,
and the immeasurable scope
of Your power
in us who believe.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

— Amen

READING:

Mk 7:31-35,37

The Lord be with you.

— *And with your spirit*

A Reading from the holy Gospel
according to Mark

— *Glory to You, O Lord*

Jesus left the district of Tyre
and went by way of Sidon
to the Sea of Galilee,
into the district of the Decapolis.

And people brought to Him
a deaf man

who had a speech impediment
and begged Him
to lay his hand on him.

Jesus took him off by himself
away from the crowd.

He put his finger
into the man's ears and,
spitting, touched his tongue;
then He looked up to Heaven
and groaned,
and said to him, "Ephphatha!"
(that is, "Be opened!").

And immediately
the man's ears were opened,
his speech impediment was removed,
and he spoke plainly.

The people were
exceedingly astonished,
and they said,
"He has done all things well.

He makes the deaf hear
and the mute speak."

The Gospel of the Lord

— *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

It is only with God's help
that we are saved;
we cannot save ourselves.

By "grace," we mean God's favour,
or graciousness,
by which He bestows on us,
as a free supernatural gift,
all that we need
to save us
and make us holy. —

We obtain divine life,
and all we need to sustain it,
chiefly through prayer
and the Sacraments.

A Sacrament is a perceptible sign
of God's grace,
instituted by Christ
and entrusted to the Church,
which, by the action of Christ
and the power of the Holy Spirit,
dispenses divine life to us.
More briefly,
it is an outward sign
of inward grace,
ordained by Jesus Christ.

The Sacraments
always bestow God's gifts
on those who receive them worthily.

We ought to have a great desire
to receive the Sacraments,
because they are
the chief means of our salvation.

There are seven Sacraments:
Baptism,
Confirmation,
Holy Eucharist,
Penance,
the Sacrament of the Sick,
Holy Orders,
and Matrimony.

BIBLE READING

Is 35-49

In the Bible reading
for next week,
you will come across the words
that John the Baptist,
Jesus' cousin,
used to identify himself:
"A voice in the desert cries out,
prepare the way of the Lord!
Make straight in the wasteland
a highway for our God!"

John prepared the way for Jesus
by proclaiming
a Baptism of repentance,
which led to the forgiveness of
sins.

Baptism and its Confirmation
are what we will talk about
next week.

Grace and the Sacraments

Introduction

As God's artifacts,¹ humans have only natural life, *Bios*. In contrast, God has supernatural life, *Zoë*. However, when God the Son took on *Bios* in the Person of Jesus Christ,² He brought *Zoë* down into the human race. Now we can acquire it from Him³ and thus become "gods,"⁴ alive with *Zoë* as well as *Bios*.⁵

Christ gives us *Zoë* by grafting us on to Himself like branches on to a vine,⁶ or, alternatively, by making us members of His Mystical Body.⁷ Thus we become His adopted brothers and sisters and God's adopted children,⁸ with full rights in God's family,⁹ "as if born"¹⁰ to Him.

This is what God offered humans from the very beginning. This is what Adam and Eve lost by trying to seize it for themselves.¹¹ This is what Christ made possible for us once again by His saving acts.¹² Our transformation into "gods" may be called the "fruit"¹³ of those acts.

Sacraments

How does Christ "communicate" the "fruit" of His saving work to us today?

The answer is that ever since Pentecost,¹⁴ when the Church was first manifested to the world by "the outpouring of the Holy Spirit," Christ has "communicated" or "dispensed" the "fruits" of His saving work to us through His Church's *Sacraments*.¹⁵

The "Sacraments" are defined to be

- "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us."¹⁶
- "perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature," which, "by the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit," make present "efficaciously the grace that they signify."¹⁷
- "outward signs of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ."¹⁸

Let us consider these definitions, word by word and phrase by phrase.

Grace: original meaning

First: "grace." The word comes from the Latin *gratia*, a translation of the Greek *charis*, which is used in the Bible to mean God's loving benevolence, or goodwill, toward the human race.¹⁹

For example, as the Child Jesus grew, "the *charis* of God was upon Him";²⁰ that is, those who watched Him could see that God willed nothing but good for Him.

Using the same word, the Angel Gabriel addressed Mary as "*kecharitomene*,"²¹ often translated as "you who are full of grace."²² Here the meaning is not so clear. Indeed, Mary herself "wondered what [the angel's] greeting meant."²³ To clarify it,

1 That is, things He has created.

2 See the talk on "Who is Jesus Christ?"

3 See the talk on "The Communion Among the Saints in the Body of Christ."

4 CCC 460

5 See the talk on "Supernatural Life."

6 See Jn 15:4-5.

7 See 1 Cor 12:12-27.

8 See Mt 6:9; Jn 1:10-12; Rom 8:29; Eph 2:4-5; Heb 2:9-11; 1 Jn 3:1. See the talk on "Mary and Joseph."

9 See Rom 8:15-17.

10 The language of British Columbia's adoption legislation 1956-1995.

11 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

12 See the talk on "The Communion Among the Saints in the Body of Christ."

13 See CCC 1076.

14 See the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

15 See CCC 1076.

16 CCC 1131

17 See CCC 1084.

18 *The Penny Catechism*, 249

19 See Joseph Ratzinger: *God and the World*, Part I, 1, "Freedom."

20 Lk 2:40

21 Lk 1:28

22 See the Ronald Knox translation.

we sometimes replace "grace" with "favour": "O highly favoured daughter!"

For example, when Barnabas visited the Christians in Antioch, he saw "the *charis* of God" — "the evidence of God's favour."²⁴

"Grace," then, means "favour,"²⁵ but it incorporates two very important meanings.

First: the Latin *gratia*, *gratis* means "gift freely given." Indeed, *gratis* has passed into English unchanged. In both languages it means "costing nothing," "given without recompense." "Gratuity" comes from the same source: a payment made freely, not part of the price. So does "gratuitous": "got or given free, not earned or paid for."²⁶

God's favour toward us is indeed utterly gratuitous. We have no claim whatsoever on God. On our own,²⁷ we cannot *deserve* or *merit* His favour or do anything to *earn* it.²⁸ "Who has given Him anything so as to deserve return?"²⁹

Second: *condescension* is an essential element of God's favour to us. "Condescend" comes from the Latin *condescendere*: "to descend [to be] with." It means "to stoop down," "to waive, or set aside, one's superiority." In dealing with humans Person to person, God indeed *condescends*, for He is infinitely superior to us.

Among humans, "condescension" often means the "top-loftiness" of a person who *wants to appear* superior. Of course, God is not condescending in that sense.

In fact, in His ultimate condescension — when God the Son "humbled Himself to share in our humanity"³⁰ — He did not "deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, He emptied Himself, and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men."³¹

God's "grace," then, means His utterly undeserved favour and condescension to humans. Perhaps the single word that best sums it up for us today is "graciousness."

Grace: extended meaning

God manifests His graciousness to us by gifts. Conversely, He gives us gifts because He is gracious. Accordingly, we use "grace" to mean not only God's graciousness, but also the gifts He bestows on us in His graciousness.³²

Similarly, "favour" means not only the regard someone has for us, but also what he freely gives us or does for us because of his regard. For example, a person who favours us will readily "do us a favour."

God's gifts include all that we have and are and are called to be, in our *Bios* and in our *Zoë*. However, His supernatural gifts to us are so much greater than His natural gifts that when the Church speaks of "grace," she usually means "something more than the gifts of nature"³³ (*Bios*); she means His supernatural gifts.³⁴

By God's "grace," then — His "favour" to us — the Church means "the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to His call" to become His children, alive with *Zoë*.³⁵ In fact, the call itself — the invitation to enter "the intimacy" of the Holy Trinity's life³⁶ — is part of that "favour," for it "depends entirely" on God's gratuitous initiative³⁷; only He "can reveal and give Himself."³⁷

In its extended meaning, then, "grace" is not only God's graciousness, but also the

23 Lk 1:29

24 Acts 11:23

25 See CCC 1996.

26 When we use "gratuitous" to describe sex and violence in entertainment, we mean "uncalled for, unwarranted, motiveless, done without good reason" — without anything being given in compensation.

27 Before our "filial adoption," by which God bestows on us the capacity to merit. (See CCC 2008–2011.)

28 See CCC 2007.

29 Rom 11:35

30 Prayer during the Offertory of the Mass.

31 Phil 2:6–7

32 See John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Grace."

33 Like good health. See John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Grace."

34 "Grace" is often used to distinguish *supernatural* from *natural*. For example, Mary's motherhood "in the order of grace" — her motherhood of Christ's Mystical Body (see the talk on "Mary and Joseph") — is analogous to motherhood "in the order of nature" (Pope John Paul II: *Redemptoris Mater*, 45).

35 See CCC 1996.

36 CCC 1997

37 CCC 1998

favours which, in His graciousness, He bestows on us — especially the supernatural favours related to our *Zoë*.

"By God's grace"

Now words have a way of changing their meaning, usually through misunderstanding. Take the hymn *Amazing Grace*, for example. The author, John Newton,³⁸ marvelling at the supernatural favours he has received from God, says, "'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

More accurately, it is *God*, in His graciousness, Who has brought him safe thus far, and *God*, in His graciousness, Who will lead him home.

Similarly, a man might say that he has overcome an addiction "by the grace of God," meaning that *God*, in His graciousness, has enabled him to recover.³⁹

Such abbreviations are acceptable as long as we understand them. However, if we are not careful, "grace" can take on a life of its own.⁴⁰

For example, we sometimes say that Christ saved us "by His grace" instead of "by His death," as if "grace" is the *means* or the *tool* He employed; or we ask for "the help of God's grace" instead of "the help of God," as if "grace" is God's *agent*; or we say that the Sacraments give us "God's grace" instead of "supernatural life" or "forgiveness," as if "grace" is the *object* of a Sacrament.⁴¹

"In a state of grace"

This phrase has a definite meaning: to be "in a state of grace" is to be "free from all unrepented mortal sin (which kills our *Zoë*)⁴² and pleasing to God."

Signs

When we say, then, that the Sacraments are "signs of grace"⁴³ we mean that they are "signs of God's supernatural favour."

Now let us consider what we mean by "signs."

Signs are important in human life. Because we are body and soul, we use *material* signs to perceive and express *immaterial* ("non-material") realities. For example, we perceive a person's feelings (which we cannot see) by observing his words, gestures, actions, and facial expressions (which we can see). We express our own emotions in similar ways.⁴⁴

Some signs, like words, are purely conventional. For example, in English, the word "fire" signifies a chemical process that produces light and heat. However, the word "fire" signifies nothing to a person who does not speak English. Nor can the word teach him what fire is, for it bears no resemblance to the reality it signifies.

Other signs, like pictures, are universal. A picture of blazing logs in a fireplace signifies fire to everyone. It can even be used to teach someone what fire is.

38 (1725-1807). Born in England, he grew up with no religious convictions, was pressed into the Royal Navy, and eventually became a slave trader. A storm frightened him so much that he called out to God for mercy, and his conversion began. After a few more years as a slaver, he quit the sea, began studying theology, and became a clergyman in the Church of England in 1764. As curate of Olney, in Buckinghamshire, he began to write hymns with the poet William Cowper. *Amazing Grace* was written to illustrate a sermon on New Year's Day 1773. It was printed in 1779 in Newton and Cowper's *Olney Hymns*.

39 Whether in a normal or an abnormal way. See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

40 As a child, ignorant of the meaning of "grace" but familiar with the prayer at the end of the Angelus ("Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts"), I pictured grace as a sort of snow-white porridge that God kept in a jug and poured into my heart!

41 Similarly, "by chance" suggests to some people that chance is an agent alternative to God; they ask whether God or chance is responsible for what they observe. "By Newton's Law" sounds to some people that the law actually *makes* things happen (see the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith"). "Providence" means God's care, His "providing," for us (see Lk 12:28), but some people use it as another name for God and give it a capital "P," or think of it as the deputy to whom God assigns the job of caring for us. For example, when a clergyman says "we mustn't question the ways of Providence," an old lady replies, "I've had enough of Providence. First he took my husband, and then he took my 'taters, but there's One above as'll teach him to mend his manners, if he don't look out!" (Dorothy Sayers: *The Nine Tailors*, The First Part: "Mr. Gotobed is Called Wrong With a Double").

42 See the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness."

43 CCC 1131

44 See CCC 1146.

Some material signs point almost universally to immaterial things; that is, they *symbolize* immaterial things. For example, fire symbolizes human love by its warmth and beauty, its ability to spread, its necessity for life, and the destruction it can cause. In fact, fire can be used to teach us about human love, for it summarizes our experience of love and makes it "sensible" in the old meaning of the word: that is, "capable of being perceived by the senses."^{4 5}

As social beings, we use signs and symbols to communicate:^{4 6} universal symbols as well as words. For example, politicians kiss babies to symbolize fatherly care. Men shake hands to express brotherly goodwill. Even before they can talk, infants use tears, smiles, and hand movements to symbolize love, rejection, and aggression.

Symbolism is built into our nature. For example, our male and female organs symbolize our masculinity and femininity. Enormous psychological damage is caused when such deep-seated symbolism is skewed or distorted.^{4 7}

Signs of the spiritual

The Church, too, uses material things as signs: not just signs of immaterial realities, but even signs of spiritual realities.

For example, at the Easter Vigil, the initial darkness of the church symbolizes sin; the lighting of the new fire, Christ's Resurrection; the light passed from one candle to another, the passing on of *Zoë*; and the priest's breath on the water, the power it has from the Holy Spirit to give us *Zoë* in Baptism.^{4 8}

Jesus Himself used material signs to point to spiritual realities. For example, when the scribes questioned His power to forgive sins (something they could not see), He made a paralyzed man stand up (something they could see) to help them "realize" that He had "authority on earth to forgive sins."^{4 9}

Throughout His teaching, in His parables, Jesus used material things to tell us about the Kingdom of Heaven: seed growing in the ground,^{5 0} yeast raising dough,^{5 1} a shepherd seeking a lost sheep,^{5 2} or fishermen sorting a catch.^{5 3}

In His miracles, Jesus "made a deliberate display of the sacramental principle."^{5 4} For example, to cure a blind man, He "spat on the ground, made mud with His saliva, and smeared the man's eyes with the mud. Then He told him, 'Go; wash in the pool of Siloam.'" So the man "went and washed, and came back able to see."^{5 5}

None of this should surprise us. God made the physical world as well as the spiritual, and He loves everything He made.^{5 6} Repeatedly, as He created the universe, He "saw how good it was."^{5 7}

In particular, God made humans, body and soul, in His image.^{5 8} "The human body shares in the dignity of the image of God"; it is "the whole human person that is intended to become, in the Body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit."^{5 9}

In fact, humans constitute the link between the physical and the spiritual in God's creation.^{6 0} In humans, "the elements of the material world" are "brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voices in praise" to their Creator.^{6 1}

45 See Vincent Hawswell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*, 2.

46 See CCC 1146.

47 See Vincent Hawswell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*, 2. Also see the talk on "The Last Seven Commandments," Appendix 5.

48 "Spirit" is related to words connected with breathing: "respiration," "expiration," "inspiration," etc.

49 See Mt 9:1-8.

50 See Mk 4:26-29.

51 See Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21.

52 See Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:3-7.

53 See Mt 13:47-50.

54 Ronald Knox: *The Belief of Catholics*, XVI

55 Jn 9:6-7. See also Mk 7:32-35.

56 See Wis 11:24.

57 Gn 1:4,10,12,18,21,25. See also Gn 1:31.

58 See Gn 1:26, 2:7.

59 See CCC 364.

60 Ransom saw that the Lord and Lady of Perelandra "united the warm multitude of the brutes behind him with the transcorporeal intelligences at his side," making "one music" of "all the separate notes of strength or beauty which that assembly had hitherto struck" (C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*, 17).

61 See Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 14. "The whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons

Accordingly, the prophet Daniel exhorts all creation to praise God: "Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all forever.... Sun and moon, bless the Lord.... Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord...."⁶²

We must not try to be more spiritual than God, like King Ahaz of Judah.⁶³ When God told him to "ask for a sign," he replied, "I will not ask! I will not tempt [test] the Lord!" But God said, "Is it not enough for you to weary men; must you also weary God? Therefore the Lord God will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with Child, and bear a Son, and shall name Him Immanuel."⁶⁴

Efficacious signs

The Sacraments, then, are signs: words and actions that are "accessible to our human nature."⁶⁵

But they are not just ordinary signs. We call them *efficacious*⁶⁶ signs, for they actually *make present* or *bring about* or *accomplish* or *effect* what they symbolize.

The airplane you see on signs on the way to the airport is an ordinary sign. It signifies the way to the airport, but it does not accomplish what it signifies: it does not take you to the airport or lift you up into the air.

In contrast, consider this sign, seen outside a church: "If you're waiting for a sign from God to come back to church, this is it." This sign does accomplish — or at least help to accomplish — what it signifies.

So does a handshake. "A handshake is a sign of friendship that builds friendship," the late Archbishop James Carney of Vancouver used to say at Confirmations. A handshake helps to bring about what it signifies.⁶⁷

Sometimes, even legally, mere words are efficacious signs. For example, in the British or Canadian Navy, a man becomes legally captain of a ship by reading, out loud, in the presence of the ship's company, his letter of appointment. A person does not become legally guilty of a crime until a judge says so.

Similarly, a man and a woman become legally husband and wife by saying the words, "I take you to be my husband" and "I take you to be my wife." Without those words, the marriage is null and void, even in secular law.

(At a wedding Father Vince once attended, the best man pretended to have lost the ring. In the subsequent fun, the minister forgot the bride's vows. When the omission was pointed out, he argued that her *intention* had been enough. "So if I intend to write you a cheque, but forget to sign it, it doesn't matter?" Father Vince said. Finally, the minister got the bride to say her vows in the sacristy.)

Linguists call such acts *speech acts*. "In saying something, we do something."⁶⁸

Of course, for the words to be genuine signs, we must intend what they mean. For example, a couple do not become husband and wife by reciting their vows during the wedding rehearsal because they do not intend to marry at that point. But at the wedding itself, said with the right intention, the words do bring into being the immaterial reality they signify.

However, what the Sacraments signify is *spiritual* and *supernatural*, not just immaterial. How can material signs bring supernatural realities into being?

The answer is "by the power of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁹

* * * * *

of God. Creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord, but by him who once subjected it [namely Adam]; yet not without hope, because the world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the sons of God. Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now" (Rom 8:19-22).

62 See Dn 3:57-90.

63 Ahaz reigned over Judah 735-715 BC.

64 See Is 7:10-14.

65 CCC 1084

66 "Effective."

67 For an illuminating analysis of the relation between a sign and what it signifies, see C.S. Lewis: *The Weight of Glory*, II "Transposition."

68 John Langshaw Austin: *How to Do Things with Words*

69 CCC 1084

By the power of the Holy Spirit

In military language, the Latin *sacramentum* meant "oath." Used for a soldier's oath of allegiance, it meant "a solemn promise." In non-military language, it meant the monetary "pledge" deposited by the parties in a civil suit.⁷⁰

In the Old Testament, God made a *covenant* with the Israelites,⁷¹ establishing "bonds of sacred kinship" with them.⁷² Now a covenant was sealed with an *oath*.⁷³ In fact, "oath" and "covenant" were virtually interchangeable.

For example, we read that God "remembered the holy covenant He made, the oath He swore to Abraham our father."⁷⁴ And again, "I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you; you became Mine, says the Lord God."⁷⁵

And when Jesus established His "new and eternal"⁷⁶ covenant with us, He too made a most solemn promise.⁷⁷

He took bread and wine, thanked God for them, and gave them to His apostles, saying "This is My Body" and "This is My Blood."⁷⁸ And the Catholic Church has always understood that as He spoke these words, Jesus, Who was God the Son, actually changed the bread and the wine into His own Body and Blood.⁷⁹

Then He said, "Do this as a remembrance (in Greek, *anamnesis*) of Me."⁸⁰ *Anamnesis* means not a mere *recollection* of a past event, but its *re-calling*, so that it becomes "in a certain way present and real."⁸¹

Therefore, when Jesus said, "Do this as an *anamnesis*," He was commanding His apostles to do and say what He had just done and said: *both* His natural words and actions *and* His supernatural change of bread and wine into His Body and Blood.

Now the apostles could perform His natural words and actions by their own power, but not the supernatural change. Christ's command, therefore, implied a promise that their performance of the natural words and actions would bring about the supernatural change.⁸²

We can think of the Sacraments, then, as God's oaths or pledges or promises to grant us supernatural favours in response to our performance of certain signs comprising human words and actions.

The Sacraments are not magic. To attribute their power "to their mere external performance" — as if the outward signs give us power over God — is "to fall into superstition":⁸³ a serious breach of the First Commandment.⁸⁴

Nonetheless, the Church maintains that in the Sacraments, human signs actually *bring about* God's supernatural favours. He grants these favours "by the power of the Holy Spirit," but His promise to do so makes our signs *signals* that really do bring about His action.

Why does God wait for our signals? Does He not already yearn to lavish His supernatural favours on us?

Yes; but out of respect for the freedom He has given us,⁸⁵ He refrains from forcing them on us.⁸⁶ Only when He gets our signal does He act.

70 The Latin *sacramentum* is used in the Bible to translate the Greek *mysterion* (something "closed, secret").

71 See Gn 1:26-2:3, 3:15, 9:8-17, 12:1-3, 22:16-18; Ex 3:4-10, 19:5-6; 2 Sm 7:8-16.

72 Scott Hahn: *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, 1

73 See the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

74 Lk 1:16

75 Ez 16:8. See also Dt 29:11-13; 1 Chr 16:15-16; Ps 89:4, 105:8-9; Ez 17:13.

76 Words of consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer.

77 Like the oaths of the old covenants, it was solemnized by a sacrifice, ratified in blood. (See the talks on "The History of Our Salvation" and "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice.")

78 See Mt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22:7-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26.

79 Not apparently, but really. See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

80 See Lk 22:17-20.

81 See CCC 1362-1364. Also see the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

82 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

83 CCC 2111

84 See the talk on "The First Three Commandments."

85 "In a certain sense one could say that confronted with our human freedom, God decided to make Himself 'impotent,' or 'powerless' (Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, "Why Does God Tolerate Suffering?").

86 "Do not give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before swine," Jesus said (Mt 7:6).

Father Vince once saw Queen Elizabeth turn on a new generator with a large ornamental switch. Hidden in the background was an engineer with the real switch. The instant the Queen acted, he acted. The Queen's action was merely the sign or signal for him to act; it was his action that really started the generator. Yet it is not wrong to say that the Queen started it. Without her sign, he would not have acted and the generator would not have started.⁸⁷

Sacraments, then, are outward signs performed by humans which actually bring about the supernatural favours they symbolize — not by their own power, but by "the power of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁸

Instituted by Christ

The Sacraments were "instituted" or "ordained" (*i.e.*, ordered) by Christ.⁸⁹

For example, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation when He "breathed" on His apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound."⁹⁰

He instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders when, "taking bread and giving thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My Body to be given for you. Do this as a remembrance of Me.'"⁹¹

Jesus' institution of the other Sacraments is not so evident. Either it is not recorded in the Bible, or it is less obvious. We shall consider the institution of each Sacrament individually in the coming weeks.

Entrusted to the Church

Any sign is *important* in the word's original sense: it is a *portent*,⁹² pointing to a reality beyond itself. We cannot change the sign without distorting this reality.⁹³

For example, when Naaman the Syrian visited Elijah to be cured of leprosy, and Elijah sent word that he should bathe seven times in the Jordan River, Naaman was angry. "I thought that he would surely come out and stand there to invoke the Lord his God, and would move his hand over the spot," he retorted. "Are not the rivers of Damascus" better than "the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be cleansed?"

No. Naaman was not cured until he performed the sign Elijah had determined.⁹⁴ And it is even more important not to change a sign pointing to a *supernatural* reality.

Accordingly, in the Old Covenant, God determined the "signs and symbols" His people would use in their "liturgical life":⁹⁵ for example, circumcision,⁹⁶ anointing with oil,⁹⁷ laying on of hands,⁹⁸ sacrifices,⁹⁹ and, especially, the Passover.¹⁰⁰

Jesus "gave new meaning" to these "deeds and signs"¹⁰¹ by the work He performed to redeem and sanctify¹⁰² us.¹⁰³ Now, in "the age of the Church,"¹⁰⁴ His sanctification of humanity remains "active" in the Church's Sacraments.¹⁰⁵

87 Even the engineer's action could be thought of as sacramental, for even the throwing of the real switch was only a "signal" at which God initiated the action of the electromagnetic forces. See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

88 CCC 1084

89 CCC 1114, 1131. Here, "ordain" means "appoint authoritatively," "decree," "enact."

90 Jn 19:22-23. See the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness."

91 Lk 22:19-20. See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

92 From the Latin *portendere* ("indicate," "predict," "presage").

93 For example, we are not free to make laughing signify sadness, or to make the word "hot" signify cold.

94 See 2 Kgs 5:1-13.

95 See the talk on "Liturgy: Public Worship."

96 See Gn 17:9-14.

97 See Ex 28:41, 29:7; Lv 8:12; 1 Sm 16:1,12-13; 1 Kgs 19:15-16.

98 See Lv 1:4, 3:2, 4:15, 16:21; Nm 8:10.

99 See Lv 1, 3, 4, 5:14-26, 6:1-6,17-23, 7:1-21.

100 See Ex 12:1-28; CCC 1150.

101 See CCC 1151. Also see the talk on "Divine Revelation," Appendix 3.

102 "Make holy."

103 See the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

104 CCC 1076. See the talk on "What is the Catholic Church?"

105 See CCC 774.

The Sacraments "belong to the divine deposit of faith"¹⁰⁶ that Jesus entrusted to the Church.¹⁰⁷ And just as the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit,¹⁰⁸ determined the canon of the Bible,¹⁰⁹ so, with the same guidance, she determines the administration of the Sacraments.¹¹⁰

"Only the supreme authority in the Church can approve or define what is needed for their validity." Only the Church can decide "the order to be observed" in their lawful "celebration, administration, and reception."¹¹¹

For example, the Church says that for Baptism, the water must be "natural"¹¹² and the words must be "I" — not *we* — "baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit";¹¹³ for anointing, the oil must be from plants;¹¹⁴ for the Eucharist, the bread must contain some gluten;¹¹⁵ and to receive Holy Orders, one must be a man.¹¹⁶

Such rules might look like "nit-picking" — but they are important even in secular affairs. For example, on a cheque, the decimal point must be in *exactly* the right place; in a phone number, the digits must be in *just* the right order; the shape of a key must match the lock *precisely*; in a chain, *every* link must be strong; in Physics, *power* is *not* the same as *energy*, or *pressure* the same as *force*.

The rules regarding the Sacraments are even more important, for the spiritual is much more real than the physical, the soul more real than the body, *Zoë* more real than *Bios*. We think that an angel can go through walls because he is "thin" and "half-real," but in reality, "he is solid and firm and they are like cloud."¹¹⁷

Always, the Church administers the Sacraments according to Jesus' example,¹¹⁸ for His words and actions "announced and prepared what He was going to give the Church."¹¹⁹ The sacramental signs — things that God created — are oriented to Him, and He assumed them "in a particular way" at His Incarnation so that they could become "instruments of salvation, vehicles of the [Holy] Spirit, channels of grace." They are "a fundamental, essential part of the sacramental action." From the very beginning of creation, they "contain the seed" of the Sacraments.¹²⁰ Therefore, "every aspect of the celebration must be carefully tended to (space, time, gestures, words, objects, vestments, song, music ...);" "every rubric must be observed."¹²¹

The Church as Sacrament

By giving His apostles His Spirit,¹²² Jesus gave them His power to sanctify humanity, thus making them "sacramental signs" of Himself¹²³ — visible, efficacious signs. They, in turn, "entrusted this power to their successors"¹²⁴ in Christ's Church.

Accordingly, the Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation,"¹²⁵ for she is the efficacious sign — the "sign and instrument" — of unity among humans and communion with God.¹²⁶ "Like a Sacrament,"¹²⁷ she is a *visible* or perceptible

106 Canon Law, 841

107 See CCC 84.

108 See Jn 16:13.

109 See the talk on "Divine Revelation," including Appendix 4.

110 See CCC 1117.

111 Canon Law, 841

112 Code of Canons of the Eastern Church, 675 §1

113 See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Responses to Questions Proposed*, June 24 2020.

114 See Canon Law, 847.

115 See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Circular Letter to all Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences*, July 24 2003.

116 See Canon Law, 1024. Also see the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice," Appendices 2 and 3.

117 C.S. Lewis: *Out of the Silent Planet*, 15

118 Naaman's servants quash any protest: if the Church had told you "to do something extraordinary, would you not have done it? All the more now... should you do as [she says]" (2 Kgs 5:13).

119 See CCC 1115. Also see the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Inter Insigniores*, 4 (see the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice," Appendix 2).

120 Pope Francis: *Desiderio Desideravi*, 23

121 Pope Francis: *Desiderio Desideravi*, 46

122 At Pentecost; see the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

123 See CCC 1087.

124 CCC 1087

125 Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 48

sign. Her members are united by *visible* bonds, not just "internal, hidden bonds."¹²⁶

The Holy Spirit unites us to our invisible Head, Christ, by "spiritual and invisible bonds." However, He also unites us to our visible head, the Pope, by "corresponding external, visible bonds, so that this spiritual and supernatural society might appear in external form."¹²⁹ Accordingly, the Church has

- "a visible teaching authority, which publicly proposes dogma that must be interiorly believed and openly professed."
- "a visible priestly office, which publicly supervises and takes care of the visible mysteries of God" — the Sacraments.
- "a visible governing body, which orders the union of the members among themselves and which guides and directs the whole external and public life of the faithful in the Church."¹³⁰

"Finally, the whole Body of the Church is visible." It comprises "not only the just or the predestined" — "invisible" Christians, known to God alone — but all those "who are linked" with the Church by Baptism — "visible" Christians, known to everybody, even if they "are in sin."¹³¹

Dispense *Zoë*

"The Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us."¹³²

Just as our country's economy — the process by which we share the fruits of human labour — is *capitalistic*, so the Church's economy — the process by which she dispenses the fruits of Christ's saving actions — is *sacramental*.¹³³

Gradually, the Church realized and finally proclaimed formally¹³⁴ that in her liturgy — her public worship¹³⁵ — there are seven¹³⁶ "liturgical celebrations" that are, in the "strict" sense, "Sacraments instituted by the Lord."¹³⁷

Through their "visible rites," they "signify and make present" supernatural favours from God,¹³⁸ dispensing to us the fruits of Christ's saving actions:¹³⁹

- *Baptism* frees us from sin, gives us re-birth as children of God, makes us members of Christ's Mystical Body, and incorporates us into the Church.¹⁴⁰
- *Confirmation* binds us more closely to the Church and enriches us with a special strength of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴¹
- *The Eucharist* feeds our *Zoë* on Christ's Body and Blood.¹⁴²
- *Penance* gives us God's pardon for our sins, re-animates our *Zoë* if it has been killed by mortal sin, and reconciles us with the Church.¹⁴³
- *The Anointing of the Sick* "commends those who are ill" to God, "that He may raise them up and save them."¹⁴⁴
- *Holy Orders* makes a man a deacon, priest, or bishop and passes on to him the

126 See CCC 775

127 CCC 775

128 Vatican I: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*, 4

129 Vatican I: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*, 4

130 Vatican I: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*, 4

131 Vatican I: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*, 4. Also see CCC 837 and the talks on "Baptism and Confirmation" and "Divisions among Christians."

132 CCC 1131

133 See CCC 1076.

134 At the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

135 See the talk on "Liturgy: Public Worship."

136 According to the dictionary *Hebrew Word*, the Hebrew for "oath" is *shevua*, while the Hebrew for "seven" is *sheva*. The two words appear to have come from the same root: "to fill, satiate, satisfy."

137 CCC 1117

138 See CCC 1131.

139 The order of the Sacraments in this list, "while not the only one possible," helps us see that they "form an organic whole" in which each "has its own vital place." However, "in this organic whole, the Eucharist occupies a unique place as the Sacrament of Sacraments" (CCC 1211).

140 See CCC 1213. Also see the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

141 See CCC 1285. Also see the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

142 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

143 See CCC 1422. Also see the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness."

144 CCC 1499. See the talk on "Death and the End of the World."

powers that Christ gave specifically to His apostles.¹⁴⁵

- *Matrimony* establishes between a man and a woman "a partnership of the whole of life" that is "ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring."¹⁴⁶

The first three Sacraments are called the "Sacraments of Initiation," for they "lay the foundations of every Christian life."¹⁴⁷ The next two are called the "Sacraments of Healing."¹⁴⁸ The last two are called the "Sacraments at the Service of Communion," for they contribute to the salvation of those who receive them through their service to others.¹⁴⁹

The stages of our *Bios* and the sacramental stages of our *Zoë* bear "a certain resemblance."¹⁵⁰ For example, Baptism is our birth into *Zoë*, Confirmation our "coming of age," the Eucharist our nourishment, and Penance our healing.

By the action of Christ

There is one phrase in the definition of "Sacrament" we have not yet considered. Sacraments dispense *Zoë* to us¹⁵¹ not only by "the power of the Holy Spirit," but also "by the action of Christ."¹⁵² Christ instituted the Sacraments, but how does He act in their administration today?

The answer is *through His priests*. "The priest, by virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in Persona Christi Capitis*"; "in the Person of Christ the Head." His ordination as a priest configures him so closely to Christ that he now "possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the Person of Christ Himself."¹⁵³

That is why the priest says "I baptize you," "I absolve you from your sins," and, at Mass, "This is *My Body*" and "This is *My Blood*."

The priest is the "sacramental bond" that "ties" the present-day celebration of the Sacraments "to what the apostles said and did and, through them, to the words and actions of Christ, the source and foundation of the Sacraments." Thus "the ordained priesthood guarantees that it really is Christ Who acts in the Sacraments":¹⁵⁴ Christ Who baptizes, Christ Who forgives, Christ Who celebrates Mass, *etc.*

The Sacrament of Holy Orders does not preserve a priest from human weakness or sin, but it does guarantee the *efficacy* of the Sacraments at which he officiates,¹⁵⁵ "so that even the minister's sin cannot impede the fruit of grace."¹⁵⁶

Consequently, the Church claims that the Sacraments take effect by their very performance,¹⁵⁷ "independently of the personal holiness of the minister" (although their "fruits" also depend on the dispositions of the recipients).¹⁵⁸ "From the

145 See CCC 1536 and the talks on "What is the Catholic Church?" and "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

146 CCC 1601. See the talk on "Matrimony."

147 CCC 1212

148 CCC 1421

149 See CCC 1534.

150 See CCC 1210.

151 See CCC 1131.

152 CCC 1084

153 CCC 1548

154 CCC 1120

155 By ordination, the Church gives a priest authority to sign "cheques," as it were, on her spiritual Treasury, which is infinite (see the talk on "The Communion Among the Saints in the Body of Christ"), so as to "dispense divine life" (see CCC 1131) to us through the Sacraments. Such "cheques," signed by a priest, are always valid, no matter how low the "balance" in the priest's own spiritual "bank account." Conversely, "cheques" signed by anyone else are never valid, no matter how great the "balance" in the signatory's own spiritual "bank account."

156 CCC 1550. If a priest is in mortal sin, he may even celebrate Mass without having received the Sacrament of Penance, provided "there is a grave reason" to celebrate Mass "and there is no opportunity to confess." In this case, the priest must "make an act of perfect contrition, which includes the resolve to go to Confession as soon as possible" (*Code of Canon Law*, 916).

157 In Latin, *ex opere operato*: literally, "from the work performed." "Grace is always conferred by a Sacrament, in virtue of the rite performed and not as a mere sign that grace has already been given, or that the Sacrament stimulates the faith of the recipient and thus occasions the obtaining of grace, or that what determines the grace is the virtue of either the minister or [the] recipient of [the] Sacrament" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Ex Opere Operato.")

158 See CCC 1128.

moment a Sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and His Spirit acts in and through it."¹⁵⁹

Other "graces"

In Baptism, God incorporates us into the Church as members of Christ's Mystical Body.¹⁶⁰ Now "what the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church."¹⁶¹ Through the Holy Spirit, "all the parts of the Body are joined one with the other and with their exalted Head."¹⁶²

The Holy Spirit — the source of the Body's life, its unity, and "the riches of its gifts"¹⁶³ — builds up the Body "in many ways":¹⁶⁴

- through God's Word;¹⁶⁵
- through Baptism, by which He adds to the Body's members;¹⁶⁶
- through the other Sacraments, by which the Body's members grow and are healed;
- through the authority of the apostles, "which holds first place" among His gifts.¹⁶⁷
- through the virtues.¹⁶⁸
- through the special favours ("charisms"¹⁶⁹) by which He fits Christ's members for their individual roles in the Body.¹⁷⁰

In fact, the Holy Spirit's supernatural gifts to the members of Christ's Body are so many, and so varied, that when theologians speak of "grace" in the sense of "supernatural favour," they often use a modifier.¹⁷¹

For example, they speak of *sanctifying grace*: the gift of *Zoë* bestowed in Baptism, nourished in the Eucharist, and healed or re-animated in Penance.¹⁷² They speak of *actual grace*: the gift of a temporary enlightening of our mind or strengthening of our will, as the Holy Spirit judges it necessary for us to maintain our *Zoë*.¹⁷³

Personal encounter

We sometimes think how wonderful it would have been to live when we could actually see, touch, and hear Jesus. We regret that He did not stay with us longer.

Evidently, Jesus did not think it important for us to see Him with our physical eyes. In fact, He said to Thomas, "You became a believer because you saw Me. Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed."¹⁷⁴ In other words, we who believe in Jesus without having seen Him should consider ourselves "blessed" precisely *because* we have not seen Him.¹⁷⁵

Only 40 days after His Resurrection,¹⁷⁶ the apostles saw Jesus "lifted up before their eyes in a cloud that took Him from their sight."¹⁷⁷ At that moment, "sight gave way to doctrine," so that "faith might be more excellent and stronger."¹⁷⁸

Now, in prayer¹⁷⁹ — our "living relationship" with God¹⁸⁰ — we "raise our

159 CCC 1128

160 See CCC 1213. Also see the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

161 CCC 797. See the talk on "The Communion of the Saints in the Body of Christ."

162 See CCC 797.

163 See CCC 809.

164 See CCC 798.

165 See the talk on "Divine Revelation."

166 See the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

167 See the talk on "What is the Catholic Church?"

168 See the talk on "Virtue."

169 From the Greek *charisma* ("favour," "divine gift") from *charis* ("grace," "favour").

170 Whether instruction, administration, miracles, service, or prayer (see John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Charisms.") Charisms include the *graces of state* (see CCC 2004). See 1 Cor 12:1-14.

171 "Actual," "efficacious," "gratuitous," "habitual," "justifying," "preventive," "sacramental," "sanating" (or "healing"), "sanctifying," or "sufficient" (see John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Grace.")

172 It can also be described as "deifying" (CCC 1999), "justifying" (see John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Justifying Grace"), "habitual" (see CCC 2000), or "Christ's" (see CCC 1999).

173 John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Actual Grace." Also see CCC 2000.

174 See Jn 20:24-29.

175 See the talk on "The Light of Faith," Appendix.

176 See Acts 1:3.

177 Acts 1:9

178 Pope Leo I: *Sermon 74*, 2; see the talk on "The Light of Faith," Appendix..

179 See the talk on "Prayer."

hearts' eyes unimpeded to those heights where Christ is"; we raise minds not "pressed down by earthly affections."¹⁸¹

Nevertheless, Christ knows, first-hand, that humans are body and soul. He knows that we must be led to spiritual things by things that are "corporeal," or physical, and "sensible," or accessible to the senses. Accordingly, He left us "means of salvation in the shape of corporeal and sensible signs"¹⁸² — "as the nature of man demands."¹⁸³ "Sacraments and sacramentals"¹⁸⁴ are structured as a series of rites which bring into play all the dimensions of the person."¹⁸⁵

Accordingly, at His Ascension, "that which till then had been visible of our Redeemer" did not vanish, but "was changed into a sacramental presence."¹⁸⁶

From the very beginning, the Church, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, grasped that "that which was visible in Jesus, that which could be seen with the eyes and touched with the hands, His words and gestures, the concreteness of the incarnate Word — everything of Him had passed over into the celebration of the Sacraments."¹⁸⁷

Now, therefore, if we want to meet Jesus in Person — to see Him, hear Him, touch Him, taste Him, and smell His fragrance — we must go to the Sacraments.

Conclusion

As Jesus ascended, "the apostles fell down to do Him reverence" and then "returned to Jerusalem filled with joy."¹⁸⁸ Instead of regretting that we have not seen Him, we should turn to His Church's Sacraments with the same joy.

As *Sacraments of Faith*,¹⁸⁹ they not only "express" our faith, but also "nourish" and "strengthen"¹⁹⁰ it, instructing us by their universal symbolism. As *Sacraments of Eternal Life*,¹⁹¹ they unite us "in a living union" with God the Son, making us partakers of God's nature.¹⁹² As *Sacraments of Salvation*,¹⁹³ they dispense to us the fruits of Christ's life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

The Sacraments are God's "masterworks" in His new and everlasting covenant with us,¹⁹⁴ for God has promised solemnly, by the Blood of His own Son,¹⁹⁵ that if we perform their outward signs in accordance with the intention of the Church,¹⁹⁶ the Holy Spirit will give us *Zoë* and all the supernatural help we need to maintain it, so that we can live in the Holy Trinity in perfect happiness forever.

Bibliography

Scott Hahn: *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*

Scott Hahn: *Swear to God*

Vincent Hawkswell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*

C.S. Lewis: *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, "Transposition"

180 See CCC 2565.

181 Pope Leo I: *Sermon 74*, 5. See the talk on "Prayer."

182 Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Q. 61, Art. 1, Answer

183 CCC 1366

184 See the Appendix.

185 Pope John Paul II: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 27 (see the talk on "Mary and Joseph," Appendix 2).

186 Pope Leo I: *Sermon 74*, 2; see the talk on "The Light of Faith," Appendix.

187 See Pope Francis: *Desiderio Desideravi*, 9.

188 Lk 24:52. See the talk on "The Light of Faith," Appendix.

189 See CCC 1122-1126.

190 CCC 1123

191 See CCC 1130.

192 CCC 1129

193 See CCC 1127-1129.

194 CCC 1116

195 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

196 See CCC 1128.

Appendix

Sacramentals

Introduction

"Sacramentals are sacred signs which in a sense imitate the Sacraments. They signify certain effects, especially spiritual ones, and they achieve these effects through the intercession of the Church."¹

Some sacramentals are *objects*, like holy water, scapulars, medals, rosaries, candles, crosses, or crucifixes.² They become sacramentals when they are dedicated or blessed, so as to set them apart for worship and to give them the capacity to produce spiritual effects when they are used. By their blessing or dedication, they become *permanent sacramentals*.³

Other sacramentals are *actions*, like blessings, the laying on of hands, anointings, or prayers. They are called *transitory sacramentals*.⁴

Like Sacraments

In some ways, sacramentals are similar to Sacraments:

- They are sacred signs.
- They are intended to produce mainly spiritual effects.
- They are public means of sanctification and their use is an act of public worship.
- Their effectiveness is a fruit of Christ's passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.⁵

Unlike Sacraments

In other ways, sacramentals differ from the Sacraments:

- "Christ instituted the Sacraments, whereas the Church can institute or abolish sacramentals."⁶
- A Sacrament imparts graces (God's supernatural favours) in virtue of the rite itself,⁷ while the graces imparted by sacramentals depend on the disposition of the recipients and the intercession of the Church.⁸
- "The Sacraments are signs of grace; the sacramentals are only the signs of the Church's prayer."⁹
- The purpose of a Sacrament is to bring about the grace it signifies; the purpose of a sacramental is to dispose people to receive the graces of the Sacraments and to sanctify the various circumstances of life.¹⁰

Ministers of sacramentals

- Only bishops can consecrate people or dedicate places so that they become *sacred*: that is, permanently devoted to God and His worship.
- Any priest can impart blessings, except for those reserved to bishops or the Pope.
- Deacons can impart any blessing which is expressly permitted to them by liturgical law.¹¹

Recipients of sacramentals

"While blessings are to be imparted primarily to Catholics, they may be given also to catechumens¹² and, unless there is prohibition by the Church, even to non-

1 Code of Canon Law, 1166

2 See *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*.

3 See Code of Canon Law, 1166, notes.

4 See Code of Canon Law, 1166, notes.

5 See Code of Canon Law, 1166, notes.

6 See *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*.

7 In Latin, *ex opere operato*; literally, "from the work performed."

8 See *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*.

9 See Code of Canon Law, 1166, notes.

10 See Code of Canon Law, 1166, notes.

11 See Code of Canon Law, 1169, notes.

Catholics."¹³

Treatment of sacramentals

"Sacred objects, set aside for divine worship by dedication or blessing, are to be treated with reverence. They are not to be made over to secular or inappropriate use, even though they may belong to private persons."¹⁴ They "possess a special dignity" which sets them apart "from profane uses and from commerce."¹⁵

Forms of sacramentals

"Among sacramentals, blessings (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first. Every blessing praises God and prays for His gifts.

"In Christ, Christians are blessed by God the Father with every spiritual blessing."¹⁶ This is why the Church imparts blessings by invoking the name of Jesus," usually while making the sign of the cross."¹⁷

"Among those blessings which are intended for persons" — not to be confused with the sacramental ordination of priests — "are the blessing of the abbot or abness of a monastery, the consecration of virgins, the rite of religious profession, and the blessing of lectors, acolytes, catechists," extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, *etc.*

"The dedication or blessing of a church or an altar, the blessing of holy oils, vessels, vestments, bells, *etc.*," are examples of blessings that concern objects."¹⁸

Popular piety

The "religious sense" of Christians finds expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the Stations of the Cross, the Rosary, medals, *etc.*¹⁹

"These expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church, but do not replace it." They should harmonize with the Church's liturgical seasons,²⁰ accord with the Sacred Liturgy, derive from the Liturgy in some way, and lead the people to the Liturgy, "since in fact the Liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them."²¹

The Church "fosters" those forms of popular piety which express an "evangelical instinct" or "human wisdom" and which "enrich Christian life."²²

12 Unbaptized persons being instructed in Christian doctrine; from the Greek *katechoumenos* ("one instructed").

13 *Code of Canon Law*, 1170

14 *Code of Canon Law*, 1171

15 See *Code of Canon Law*, 1171, notes.

16 Eph 1:3

17 CCC 1671

18 CCC 1672

19 See CCC 1674.

20 See the talk on "The Liturgical Year."

21 See Vatican II: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 13, 3. See the talk on "Liturgy: Public Worship."

22 See CCC 1679.