

I. THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION (OUR INCORPORATION INTO THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY)

The sacraments of the Church can be related to theme of the 'community of grace' which the icon of Pentecost represents. The sacraments are the **fruit of the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.**

The sacraments can be divided into the following groups:

- The sacraments of **initiation** which introduce us into the life of the Christian community: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist.
- The sacraments of **healing**: Penance and Anointing of the Sick.
- The sacraments at the **service of communion and mission** which serve the growth of the community.

Baptism

The sacrament of Baptism is named after the central rite with which it is celebrated. To baptize means 'immerse' in water. The one who is baptized is immersed into the death of Christ and rises with him as a 'new creature' (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). This sacrament is also called the 'bath and regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit' (*Titus 3:5*). It is also called 'enlightenment' because the baptized becomes a 'son of light' (*Ephesians 5:8*).

From the day of Pentecost, the Church has administered Baptism to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ. The essential rite of this sacrament consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water over his or her head while invoking the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Everyone who is to be baptized is required to make a profession of faith. This is done personally in the case of an adult or by the parents and by the church in the case of infants. Also the godparents and the whole church community share the responsibility for the baptismal preparation as well as the development of the faith and grace given at Baptism.

Baptism is necessary for salvation for all those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility for asking for this sacrament.

Baptism takes away original sin, all personal sins and all punishment due to sin. It makes the baptized person a participant in the divine life of the Trinity through **sanctifying grace** which incorporates one into Christ and into his Church. Our baptism is the basis for communion with all Christians. Baptism bestows the theological virtues (faith, hope and love) and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. A baptized person belongs forever to Christ. He is marked with the indelible seal of Christ.

Everyone has a unique name in the Church, this is our Christian name. It should be preferably be the name of a saint who might offer the baptized a model of sanctity.

Confirmation

This sacrament is called **Chrismation** or **Confirmation** because of the essential rite of the sacrament is anointing with chrism. It is called *Confirmation* because it confirms and strengthens baptismal grace.

The Sacred Chrism is oil mixed with balsam and consecrated by the bishop. What happens in Confirmation? The anointing with Sacred Chrism, which is done by the laying on of the hand of the minister who pronounces the sacramental words. The anointing is done on the forehead of the baptized with the words. The bishop addresses candidate by name 'X, God has called you by name and made you his own', then says: 'Confirm, O Lord, your servant with your Holy Spirit' (Church of England); 'Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Roman Catholic).

The effect of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit like that of Pentecost. This outpouring impresses on the soul an indelible character (mark, seal) and produces a growth in the grace of Baptism. It roots the recipient more deeply in divine sonship, binds him/her more firmly to Christ and to the Church and reinvigorates the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the soul. It gives a special strength to witness to the Christian faith.

Only those already baptized can and should receive this sacrament which can be received only once. To receive the Confirmation, the candidate must be in the state of grace.

The minister of Confirmation is the bishop.

The Eucharist

The Eucharist is the very sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. He instituted this sacrament to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until his return in glory. Thus he entrusted to his Church this memorial of his death and Resurrection.

Jesus instituted the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, *'the night on which he was betrayed'* (1 Corinthians 11:23), as he celebrated the Last Supper with his apostles. Jesus took bread in his hands. He broke it and gave it to them saying, *'Take this and eat it, all of you; this is my body which will be given up for you'*. Then, he took the cup of wine in his hands and said, *'Take this and drink of this, all of you. This is the cup of my Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. To this in memory of me.'*

The Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life. It contains the whole spiritual good of the Church, Christ himself, our Pasch. Through the Eucharistic celebration we are united already with the liturgy of heaven and we have a foretaste of eternal life.

The most common names of this sacrament are: the Eucharist, Holy Mass, the Lord's Supper, the Breaking of the Bread, the Eucharistic Celebration, the Memorial of the passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord, the Holy Sacrifice, the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and Holy Communion.

The Eucharist is the Passover meal of the New Testament People of God. This celebration was foreshadowed in the annual Passover meal celebrated every year by the Jews with unleavened bread to commemorate their hasty, liberating departure from Egypt.

The Eucharist has two parts which together form one, single act of worship. At the table of the Word we celebrate God's Word by proclaiming and listening to it. At the table of the Eucharist included the presentation of the bread and wine, the prayer containing the words of consecration, and communion.

The celebrant of the Eucharist is the ordained priest; through the universal priesthood of the baptized all of us participate in the Mass and play our particular role.

The sacrifice on the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist (on the altar) are one and the same sacrifice. Only the manner of offering is different: in a bloody manner on the cross, in an unbloody manner in the Eucharist.

In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole church participates. The lives of the faithful, their praise, their suffering, their prayers, their work, are united to Christ.

Christ is present in the Eucharist. He is present in a true, real and substantial way, with his Body and his Blood, with his Soul and his Divinity. Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist in a sacramental way, that is, under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, Christ whole and entire, God and Man.

Transubstantiation is an important concept of faith in the Catholic Tradition. Transubstantiation means the change of the whole substance of bread into the substance of the Body of Christ and of the whole substance of wine into the substance of his Blood. This change is brought about in the Eucharistic prayer through the efficacy of the Word of Christ and by the action of the Holy Spirit. However, the outward characteristics of bread and wine remain unaltered. Christ remains present in these Eucharistic species (the bread and wine).

In the Catholic tradition, the worship due to the sacrament of the Eucharist, whether during the celebration of the Mass or outside it, is the worship of *latria*, that is, the adoration given to God alone.

The Church encourages us to participate in the Eucharist on Sundays. In the Catholic tradition, we feel obliged to celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday.

To receive the Holy Communion one must be in the state of grace, that is, not conscious of being in a grievous sin, unreconciled with others and the Christian community. In the Catholic tradition, we receive the sacrament of Reconciliation in order to celebrate the Eucharist in a worthy way. In our tradition, we are encouraged to receive the Eucharist at least twice a year (this is the bare minimum, as it were), at Christmas and Easter.

The fruits of the Holy Communion are as follows. It increases our union with Christ and with his Church. It preserves and renews the life of grace received at Baptism and Confirmation and makes us grow in love for our neighbor. It wipes away venial sins and preserves us from grievous sin in the future.