

CHAPTER THREE: THE SACRAMENTS

THE Bible uses the word “grace” to describe how God saves us. Ephesians says, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (2:8 KJV). The word grace describes both God’s attitude of undeserved favor towards us and also the divine energy or strength God gives us to accomplish his will in us. Sacraments are a means by which we receive God’s grace.

The Creation and Sacraments

A sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” (BCP 292). In sacraments, God uses visible and tangible created things to communicate invisible and intangible grace. The definition of a sacrament is rooted in the biblical teaching about creation. Romans says, “Ever since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (1:20). That is to say, the creation is an outward and visible sign of the glory of the Creator.

The Incarnation and Sacraments

In the New Testament, the Creator became a part of the creation. St. John says, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). Colossians says that Jesus is “The image of the invisible God” (1:15). Jesus Christ is the definitive outward and visible manifestation of the invisible God. Jesus Christ is the archetype of all sacraments.

We refer to the phenomenon of God becoming man as the Incarnation. Incarnation means literally “enfleshed.” God took on flesh in Christ. Sacraments are extensions of the Incarnation into the present. In sacraments, God once again reveals himself to us in physical form. Jesus Christ is the means of grace for salvation. The sacraments are the most objective means we have of access to him.

The Objective Presence of Jesus in the Sacraments

We can understand the nature of sacraments by reflecting on the distinction between things that are objective and things that are subjective. Something that is objective does not depend upon personal opinions and feelings. To say “The world is round” is a statement of objective truth. It cannot be changed by what we think or feel about it. Something that is subjective depends upon feelings or opinions. Debates about which sport, wine, food or vacation spot is the best are matters of subjective opinion or feeling.

The sacraments are objective manifestations of the presence of Jesus. We receive grace from God in the sacraments whether we feel it or not. The objective grace of the sacraments will frequently produce a positive subjective response in us. This will be more and more the case as we mature in the faith and develop the spiritual vision to perceive the grace of the sacraments. Nonetheless, Christ is present in the sacraments whether or not we feel or think that he is present.

This truth is highlighted by 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, where the presence of Christ in the Lord Supper is said to have a harmful impact on those who receive him in an unworthy manner.

We live in an age that emphasizes subjective feelings. This is why many who are accustomed to non-liturgical forms of worship, which focus on the subjective response of the worshiper, don't understand sacramental worship, which focuses on the objective presence of God. The presence of Jesus in the sacraments does not depend upon whether we experience a sense of excitement. It does not depend upon the charisma of the minister. The presence of Jesus in the sacraments is an objective fact.

In this light, we can understand the sacraments as gifts from Jesus to the church that help us to avoid a roller coaster religion of up-and-down emotions. When we come to Jesus in the sacraments, in whatever state of strength or weakness we find ourselves, whether we feel good or bad at the moment, we receive Jesus. We know we receive him because in the outward and visible sign he pledges to us the inward and spiritual grace. In courtroom terms, we have evidence of his presence.

A Sacramental World

Sacraments are the fulfillment of the creation. In the world to come there will not be sacraments because the whole creation will, once again, be a sacrament. It is only because of sin that we think of things that are physical in opposition to things that are spiritual. In the fall, man took the creation and said, "This is mine." The consequence is that man pursues the creation as the end of life, as an idol, as something to seek apart from God, rather than as a sign of the creator. The answer to the fall is not to withdraw into the realm of pure spirit. The answer is the Incarnation. God became part of the creation in order to redeem it. The Incarnation is the beginning of the redemption of the whole creation. Sacraments, as extensions of the Incarnation, point forward to the fulfillment of the creation on the Day of Resurrection (Romans 8:22).

The Sacraments

The church has generally come to recognize seven sacraments. They can be summarized as follows:

<u>Sacrament</u>	<u>Outward Sign or Form</u>	<u>Inward Grace</u>
Baptism <i>Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12, 1 Corinthians 12:13</i>	Water	Dying and rising with Christ through the gift of the Spirit
Confirmation <i>Acts 8:14-17, Hebrews 6:2</i>	Laying on of Hands	Strengthening (sevenfold) gifts of the Spirit
Holy Communion <i>1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:17-33; John 6 35-59</i>	Bread and Wine	Body and Blood of Christ Food for the life born at baptism
Confession <i>John 20:23</i>	Form of Confession/ Form of Absolution	Forgiveness
Unction <i>James 5:13-15</i>	Oil or Laying on of Hands	Healing
Marriage <i>John 2:1-11, Ephesians 5:31-32</i>	Ring	Strength to keep wedding vows
Ordination <i>John 20:21; 1 Timothy 1:6, 4:14; Titus 1:5</i>	Laying on of Hands	Strength to keep ordination vow

Because of the sacraments, we need not question whether we have received the gift of the Spirit. Jesus has pledged the saving and strengthening gifts of the Spirit to us in the objective signs of water in Baptism and the Bishop's hands in Confirmation. We need not ask, "Where is Jesus?" He said, "This is my body. This is my blood." We are given the objective assurance of forgiveness in Confession and the objective promise of healing in Unction. Married couples and those who are ordained to sacred ministry are given the grace they need to be faithful to their vows. We are called to respond to God's grace by living faithfully, but the presence of grace in the sacraments depends upon God's promise, not our response.

Objections to the Sacraments

Some people say they don't need the sacraments because they receive grace directly from God through personal prayer and Bible reading. We do not believe that grace comes to us only through the sacraments. Grace comes to us in many ways. Every Christian should have habits of personal prayer and Bible reading, but this should not keep us from receiving the objective grace of the sacraments. These are complementary aspects of a healthy spiritual life.

Some also object that they don't need the church or other individuals (bishops, priests and deacons) to be intermediaries between themselves and God. This is a misunderstanding of the nature of the church as the body of Christ. We are not saved as a collection of unrelated individuals. We are interdependent. Each part of the body depends upon the other parts (cf. Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11).

Each Christian is a sacramental person, a sign of Christ's presence and a mediator of grace. Each Christian is called to represent Christ to others through the gifts that God has given (1 Peter 4:10). When we are feeling low, Christ's presence is mediated to us through those who have the gift for encouragement. We grow in knowledge through the ministry of those who have the gift of teaching. We need the grace that comes to us from the other members of the body. The other members of the body need the grace that comes from our gifts. We all need the sacraments, which are mediated through the apostolic ministry. We have direct and personal access to God through Christ, but we are also served by Christ through the gifts of the members of his body.

Sacramentals

In addition to the sacraments, there are also various "sacramentals." These are tangible signs that remind us of God's presence and aid us in worship and prayer. The **palms** we use on Palm Sunday fall into this category. They are a physical reminder of Christ's march to victory on the cross. **Holy water** is another sacramental. We sprinkle ourselves with the sign of the cross as we enter and leave the church as a reminder of baptism and as a symbolic prayer for protection and guidance. **Statues and pictures** are sacramentals. As we look at them, our hearts are lifted to contemplate the realities they represent. People wear crosses and medals and hang icons and pictures in their homes as visible reminders of their faith.

Some people are concerned that the use of statues, crosses and pictures in worship runs into the danger of violating the second commandment concerning idolatry. However, a close examination of their use reveals that few people actually worship the physical things. Rather, the physical things we can see point us to things we can't see. A representation of Jesus on a cross calls to mind what he has done for us. An icon calls to mind some aspect of Christ's person or work or the witness of a saint who points us to Christ. There is some danger that use of an object might become excessive so that one comes to view a devotional aid as the end of devotion, and not a means to the end of God. However, this does not seem to be a great danger in our culture. Our devotional practices tend to be relatively reserved.

The greater danger is that a devotional aid might be viewed in a magical sense, as a sort of "good luck charm." The practice, for example, of burying a statue of St. Joseph in the yard of a home that is for sale might be an example of this. Objects used in Christian devotion are meant to point us to what they represent and cultivate faith. They are not meant to be substitutes for faith. For example, the wearing of cross should be a sign of genuine faith in Jesus, not a thing worn for good luck.

A Closing Note on Sacraments

The sacraments focus on the presence of God in the ordinary. Though we pray for and at times experience miraculous healing and extraordinary signs of God's presence, we also see Christ in ordinary water, bread and wine, in ordinary Christian people and in God's sovereign control of daily life. The greatest miracle from the sacramental perspective is Christ's redemptive presence in all things (Romans 8:28), rather than the odd moment when something unusual happens.

A Note on Holy Orders or Apostolic Ministry

Apostolic Ministry in the Bible

IN a sense, the sacrament of Holy Orders is the source of all the sacraments since all the sacraments are administered by those duly ordained—with the exception that a lay person may administer baptism in extreme situations.

The word apostle means, “one who is sent.” In John 20:21, in the upper room on Easter night, Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (see also Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:2-8). Thus, apostolic authority comes from Jesus himself.

The apostles exercised spiritual authority in the early church as a result of their commission from Jesus. St. Paul wrote, “I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction” (2 Corinthians 13:10). In Acts, the apostles govern the church based on the authority they have been given by Christ, not by popular vote.

The apostles who were sent by Jesus, in turn, sent others. St. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:6, “I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” Those sent by the apostles in turn are instructed to send others. St. Paul writes in Titus 1:5, “For this reason I left you [Titus as Bishop] in Crete, that you should...appoint elders [The Greek word for elder is *presbyter*, which later became known as priest] in every city as I commanded you.” And again in 1 Timothy 5:22 he writes, “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily” (see also 1 Timothy 4:14). Instructions are given as to the qualifications for those being ordained (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1:7ff.). Spiritual authority in the Bible flows from Jesus through the apostles.

The Development of Holy Orders in the Church

The New Testament mentions four orders of ministry: apostles, bishops, elders (or presbyters) and deacons (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1:5). It appears that the titles “bishop” and “elder” were used somewhat interchangeably (cf. 1 Peter 5:1, where Peter, who is an apostle, calls himself an elder). After the death of the apostles, the title of bishop was used for the men who were said to have succeeded the apostles in their office. By c. A.D. 110, St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, speaks of a three-fold ministry of bishops, presbyters (who later came to be known as priests) and deacons.

The Doctrine of Apostolic Succession

The authority Jesus gave the apostles for ministry was passed on by the apostles to successors through the laying on of hands. These successors are the bishops who stand in lineal succession from the apostles. Authority for ministry today in our church flows through the bishop and is derived ultimately from Christ himself (Ordination of Priests, BCP 546). The bishop is our tangible link with the apostolic church. The Apostolic Ministry is the pledge of sacramental grace.

However, authority for ministry does not exist in separation from the proclamation of the true faith. It is an authority of Word and Sacrament (Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:2-8). The origin of Apostolic Succession was the succession of authentic teaching in opposition to heretical or false teaching. If a bishop comes to deny the faith or teach false doctrine, he acts contrary to the very nature of his office. The early church taught that Christians must separate from heretical bishops.

During the Reformation, the continental reformers (Lutherans and Presbyterians) threw out the visible succession of bishops and said that only a succession of teaching was important. Anglicans hold that both lineal succession and right doctrine are essential to the fullness of the church's ministry.

Sacramental Grace Is Not Dependent Upon the Minister

The character or worthiness of the individual sacramental minister does not affect the flow of sacramental grace. This teaching was worked out in the church by the great church father St. Augustine in his debates with the heretical teachers known as the Donatists. It is expressed in Article xxvi of the Articles of Religion (BCP 608). The church teaches that the minister in every sacrament is Christ, for whom the visible minister is but an [inadequate] icon. Our personal opinions and feelings about the priest are irrelevant to the flow of sacramental grace. However, this doctrine does not mitigate against the need to discipline ministers who misbehave.

What Bishops, Priests and Deacons Do (BCP, p. 294)

1. Bishops
 - a. Are the focus of the church's unity—Chief Pastor.
 - b. Ordain all ministers. (Note: priests and deacons are ordained, bishops are consecrated.)
 - c. Confirm those who are baptized.

2. Priests
 - a. Preach and exercise pastoral care over the congregation. (Note: One need not be ordained to preach or to exercise pastoral gifts.)
 - b. Consecrate the communion elements.
 - c. Give blessings.
 - d. Pronounce absolution.

3. Deacons
 - a. Read the gospel in the Holy Communion.
 - b. Administer communion in church and take the reserved sacrament to the sick.
 - c. Function directly under the authority of the bishop.

A Note on Baptism and Confirmation

BAPTISM is the sacrament of entry into the Body of Christ. We are baptized “into Christ” (Romans 6:3). Through the outward sign of water, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Through the Spirit, we die and rise with Christ (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12). Our inherited sin is washed away (1 Corinthians 6:11, Titus 3:5) and we die to sin. The Spirit plants new life in us and we are raised with Christ to live in a new way. We are “born again” (John 6:3-8).

From the beginning of the church, children born into Christian families were baptized. Though some Christians object to infant baptism, it has been the universal practice of the church. There were no objections to the practice by any of the church fathers. The major reformers of the sixteenth century, Martin Luther and John Calvin, both retained infant baptism, and the Church of England continued to do as it had always done. The first objection to infant baptism came after the Reformation from a group called the Anabaptists, who were heretical in some of their beliefs. The ancient and universal tradition unambiguously bears witness that infant baptism is part and parcel of “the faith once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).

The church does not believe that baptism is a guarantee of salvation. It is the bestowal of a gift that must be received by faith. It is the planting of a seed that must be grown. It is the planting of new life that must be nurtured and fed. As suggested by the Parable of the Sower and the Seed (Luke 8:4f.), it is possible for the planted seed to become unfruitful. Infants who are baptized must come to faith and conversion of the heart when they come of age. St. Augustine wrote:

In baptized infants the sacrament of regeneration comes first and, if they hold fast to Christian piety, conversion in the heart will follow, following on the sacramental sign of it in the body. This all shows that the sacrament of baptism is one thing, the conversion of the heart is another; but the salvation of man is effected by these two (*de bapt.* 4:31-32).

We all know that if one baptized in infancy does not believe when he comes to years of discretion, and does not keep himself from lawless desires, then he will have no profit from the gift he received as a baby (*de pecc. merit.* 1.25).

From the beginning, Christian initiation was completed by the laying on of hands by the Bishop (Acts 8:17, 19:5-6; Hebrews 6:2). Baptism and the laying on hands were initially two parts of one rite of initiation. Over time in the western church, the laying on of hands by the bishop came to be separated from baptism. When those baptized as infants came to the age of discretion (generally thought to be 7 or 8) they were brought to the bishop for confirmation and began to receive communion. Confirmation came to be understood as the giving of the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2-3, BCP 297) which prepared the baptized for active service as disciples of Jesus.

Many Christians today have not been confirmed because they were baptized in churches that do not have bishops in Apostolic Succession. The normal pattern for them is to complete their baptism by being confirmed by the bishop and beginning to receive communion at that time. (cf. BCP 299).

A Note on Confession

WE do not believe that a person has to make a confession to a priest in order to be forgiven. However, the sacrament of confession can lead to a greater sense of repentance and a more profound experience of forgiveness. There are many things we don't have to do that are, nonetheless, good for us.

The person making a confession is confessing sins directly to God. The priest is present as a representative of God to pronounce absolution in the name of Jesus. The priest is also present as a representative of the church to welcome the penitent person back into the fellowship of the church. In the early church, confessions were made to the entire congregation. As the church grew, public confession became less practical. The priest came to stand in for the church in private confession.

St. James exhorts us to “confess our faults one to another” (5:16). This seems to refer to our common failings and shortcomings. However, not everyone is able to deal wisely with the knowledge of another's sin. Friends may make one of two errors. They may be shocked at what we've done and refuse to extend grace and forgiveness. Or they may be too soft, excusing our sin rather than helping us conquer it. A priest is one who is called and trained to deal with the reality of human sin, and a priest has been given authority from Christ to forgive (John 21:21-23).

Many are afraid that a priest will look at them differently after a confession. Two things must be highlighted here. First, no one's sins are all that unique. Typically, the priest hears a confession that sounds very much like his own. Second, the penitent soul is the attractive soul. Thus, the attitude of the priest hearing an honest confession is like the attitude of God and the angels (Luke 15:10).

Confessions are made under the “seal” of the confession. Nothing said in confession will ever be mentioned by a priest outside of confession. It will not even be brought up in private conversation with the person who made the confession unless that person asks specifically to talk about it.

Confession should be seen as a normal and natural thing to do. We take care of sin by confession the same way we take care of sickness with medicine. Confessions are typically made during Lent and at other times as is necessary and beneficial. A good confession will focus on specific acts of wrongdoing and neglect, and on our characteristic sinful patterns of thought and behavior. These are what we call “besetting sins.” A good confession is not a laundry list of everything, but concentrates on what is at the forefront of the spiritual battle right now. Self-examination for confession can begin with the a review of the Seven Deadly Sins (Chapter 2).

Confession is sometimes made in a confessional “box” or room, or sometimes it is done in the nave or sanctuary of the church. It depends upon the set-up of a given church. Confessions are not typically made face to face. Rather, the person making the confession faces the altar or a cross to make his confession to God. The priest faces the same direction or sits to the side as witness for the church and to represent Christ in giving absolution.

A typical form of confession is as follows:

A Form for Confession

The person making the confession (the penitent) says:

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

The priests responds:

THE Lord be in your heart and upon your lips, so that you may worthily confess all your sins; In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The penitent continues saying:

ICONFESS to Almighty God, to all the Saints, and to you, Father, that I have sinned very much, in thought, word, deed, and omission, by my own great fault. I have committed these sins:

The penitent confesses in his or her own words, and then says:

For these and all my other sins which I cannot now remember, I am very sorry, I will try to do better, and I humbly ask pardon of God; and of you Father, I ask for penance, counsel and absolution.

The Priest may offer words of counsel. Then he assigns a suitable penance. Penance having been enjoined and accepted, the Priest shall say:

The Form of Absolution

ALMIGHTY God have mercy upon thee, forgive thee thy sins, and bring thee to everlasting life. Amen.

THE Almighty and merciful Lord grant thee pardon, absolution, and remission of thy sins. Amen.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offenses: And by his authority committed unto me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Go in peace. The Lord hath put away all thy sins.

A Note on Unction

ONE of the challenges of promoting the Sacrament of Unction (to anoint or lay hands upon a person with prayers for healing) is its historical association with the Roman Catholic practice of “extreme unction,” administered as part of the “last rites.” The person receiving this form of unction, quite far from being healed, died shortly thereafter. Thus, a priest once said to a parishioner whose husband was at home sick, “May I come by and pray for him?” She responded, “He’s not that sick.” She meant that he wasn’t about to die—and she did not want to hasten his departure with a priestly visit!

We must emphasize that the sacrament of unction is for healing. The church regularly prays for the sick with the intention that God will grant them restoration of health. Any one who has any kind of significant ailment should receive unction. When people become sick to the point of being unable to attend church, the normal and natural thing is for a priest to regularly visit to give communion and pray for healing.

James 5:14-15 specifically connects unction with forgiveness. The person desiring healing should use the opportunity of the sickness or ailment to confess his or her sins. The Bible teaches that some ailments result from specific sins (Luke 5:22-25), but also makes it clear that this is not always the case (John 9:1-3). In any event, since the human condition of weakness and mortality results from the fall, sickness can always be used as an opportunity to reflect on our general condition of sin.

We do not believe that God heals every sickness. We will all die eventually. However, God does sometimes grant miracles of healing. We should believe that this is possible, if it is God’s will. We believe that God always gives grace to the afflicted through unction. The grace may be full healing, partial healing or spiritual healing that occurs because the afflicted person gains some new spiritual insight or makes progress in the faith through the affliction.

The Prayer Book form for unction (320) is as follows:

UNCTION OF THE SICK

¶ When any sick person shall in humble faith desire the ministry of healing through Anointing or Laying on of Hands, the Minister may use such portion of the foregoing Office as he shall think fit, and the following:

OBLESSED Redeemer, relieve, we beseech thee, by thy indwelling power, the distress of this thy servant; release him from sin, and drive away all pain of soul and body, that being restored to soundness of health, he may offer thee praise and thanksgiving; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

IANOINT thee with oil (or I lay my hand upon thee), In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; beseeching the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all thy pain and sickness of body being put to flight, the blessing of health may be restored unto thee. Amen.

Questions for Review

1. What is a sacrament?
2. How are the sacraments related to the Creation and the Incarnation (God becoming man)?
3. List the Seven Sacraments, giving for each its outward sign or form and its inward grace.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.
4. Why do we baptize infants?
5. What is the doctrine of the “Objective” or Real Presence?

6. What is Apostolic Succession? What are the two essential components of it?

7. What are the three orders of the Apostolic Ministry?

1.

2.

3.

8. Which two sacraments must be administered by a bishop?

9. What three things does a priest do in the liturgy of Holy Communion that a deacon does not do?

1.

2.

3.

10. What two liturgical functions does the deacon traditionally carry out in the Holy Communion?

1.

2.