

The 7 Sacraments

- 1) Baptism
- 2) Confirmation
- 3) Eucharist
- 4) Penance
- 5) Anointing of the sick
- 6) Holy Orders
- 7) Matrimony

“Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law... The seven sacraments touch all stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian’s life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life.¹

What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give special grace. It may also be called a sacred and mysterious sign and ceremony ordained by Christ to convey grace to our souls.

The Sacraments may be compared to channels which convey water from a fountain-head, and the soul to a vessel which one carries to these channels to be filled. The Passion of Christ is the rich and exhaustless source from which the grace of every Sacrament is derived; for each grace was purchased for us at the price of our Divine Redeemer’s Blood.

The Church has never instituted, and could not institute, any Sacrament – this is a power reserved to God Himself.

GRACE FROM THE SACRAMENTS

Sacraments give two kinds of grace: *Sanctifying grace* (the grace which confers on our souls a sharing in the life of God Himself) and *sacramental grace* (special grace that helps us to carry out the particular purpose of the sacrament).

Sacrament	Particular Sacramental Grace
Baptism	Helps us to live as children of God, makes it easier for us to believe in God and to act accordingly, and lessens our inclinations to evil.
Confirmation	Gives us strength to profess our faith even under difficulties and persecutions and to give good example to others.
Eucharist	Nourishes our love of God and one another and helps to overcome our natural self-love, or selfishness.
Penance	Helps to cure the deeper inclinations to evil that actual sins have put in our soul and makes it easier for us to keep out of sin in the future.
Anointing of the sick	Helps us to accept sickness as a purifying cross sent by God and even to accept death willingly from His hands whenever He chooses to send it.
Holy Orders	Helps a priest to fulfill his sacred duties and to be a good priest.
Matrimony	Helps married people to bear which each other’s defects and to fulfill the duties of their state, chiefly bringing children into the world and rearing them for God.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF THE SACRAMENTS

Sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are called sacraments of Christian initiation, because they lay the foundations of every Christian life.

Sacraments of healing: Penance and Anointing of the Sick are called sacraments of healing. The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue...His work of healing and salvation, even among her own members.

Sacraments at the service of communion: Holy Orders and Matrimony are directed toward the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.

Sacraments of the living: Confirmation, Eucharist, Anointing of the sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony are called sacraments of the living because their chief purpose is to give more grace to souls already spiritually alive through sanctifying grace.

Sacraments of the dead: Baptism and Penance are called sacraments of the dead because their chief purpose is to give the supernatural life of sanctifying grace to souls spiritually dead through sin.

OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Reception of one of the sacraments of the living while in the state of mortal sin is a **mortal sin of sacrilege**, because one is treating a sacred thing with grave irreverence.

Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders can be received only once because they imprint on the soul a spiritual mark, called a character, which lasts forever. This imprint comes from the Holy Spirit and is the *seal of the Lord* ("*Dominicus character*") "for the day of redemption."

"Sacrament of sacraments" – The Eucharist occupies a unique place as the "Sacrament of sacraments", since "all the other sacraments are ordered to it as to their end."

References:

- 1) **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, pp. 311, 357, 383.
- 2) **Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism**, Official Revised Edition, No. 2, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1962, pp. 144-150.
- 3) **Baltimore Book of Prayers**, Prepared and enjoined by order of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, May 17, 1889, reprinted 1996, Roman Catholic Books, Ft. Collins, CO, p. 419.