

RCIA  
The Sacraments of Initiation  
Session 15

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**“The Sacraments of Christian Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist – lay the foundations of every Christian life. The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian Initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of Charity.”**

***(# 1212 Catechism of the Catholic Church)***

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## The Sacraments of Initiation

### Baptism:

By God's grace any human being can be reborn to a new life that will never end. That birth is **Baptism**, the sacrament which unites us to the life of Christ himself and opens for us the pathway to the other sacraments of eternal life. It enters us into the "**Mystery**", **that is God**.

A sacrament may simply defined as a sign from Christ by which he comes to us and gives us life and love. The sign may be clearly expressed in the Bible, like the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of the Eucharist, or it may be the result of the Church's experience and reflection, such as the exchange of vows in matrimony. Each sacrament includes the use of scripture. In every sacrament Christ acts through the signs and speaks through Scripture.

The first mention of baptism in the New Testament is made in reference to John the Baptizer, who invited people to be "Baptized" in the Jordan River as a sign of repentance (Matt.3: 1 – 7). John's baptism symbolized a desire to be freed of sin and to live more worthily. Jesus was baptized by John, not because he needed to repent but because he wanted to show his oneness with humanity.

John's baptism was not the baptism given by Jesus. John said he was baptizing with water for repentance, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3: 11). The baptism of Jesus is not merely a symbol of repentance but a powerful action of Jesus that brings God's life to us. As Jesus explained, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of Spirit is spirit (John 3: 5 – 6).

After his Resurrection, Jesus told the apostles to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: (Matt 28: 19). So Peter told his hearers on the first Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...Those who accepted his message were baptized." (Acts 2: 38, 41)

What does Baptism do for us? First, it brings forgiveness of sins. Paul wrote: "We were indeed buried with him(Christ) through baptism into death...(Romans 6:4). This means that we have died to the old life of sin; baptism brings "death" to sin. In traditional Catholic theology, this includes deliverance from original sin and any personal sins one has committed.

Second, baptism brings new life. Paul noted that we have been buried with Christ, "so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). This newness of life is God's love which gives our actions a special worth in God's sight and offers a

pledge of eternal life. It gives graces which help us to overcome temptation and to imitate Christ in thought, word, and in action.

Thirdly, baptism gives us union with God. God wants to be close to us, and joins us to the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through baptism. Scripture refers to this in many ways. A Christian is a “temple of God” in whom “the Spirit of God dwells (1Cor 3:16). Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with us always (John 14:15) and promised also, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (John 14:23). The Church teaches that in baptism we are given the virtues of faith, and love, by which our union with God is nourished and strengthened.

Fourth, baptism confers membership in the church, the Body of Christ. Paul wrote: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1Cor 12:13). That “one body” is the Body of Christ on earth, the Church. And there is a life which does not have to end in death. That is “rebirth” to a life where faith, hope, and love cannot be destroyed, because they are given to us by God.

### **Baptism and the Church**

In the NT people who heard the Good News of Christ were baptized soon after professing faith in Jesus (see Acts 2; 8; 10; 16). But when persecutions started, the Church began to require a period of instruction lasting one or more years. The weeks before Easter were a special time of preparation and prayer, leading up to the Easter Vigil celebration when new converts were baptized confirmed with the Holy Spirit, and given the Eucharist.

At first baptism was conferred by immersing the candidate. Paul implies this when he says that we are buried with Christ in baptism and rise to new life. In time baptism was also administered by the pouring of water over a candidate’s head, perhaps because immersion proved to be inconvenient in colder climates.

Preparation for baptism was shortened when mass conversions began and entire tribes were received into the Church with their leaders. As Christianity spread, the practice of infant baptism became common. It may be that children had been baptized even in NT times because families were baptized together, and this presumably included children (Acts 10; 11: 14 – 15; 16: 15 – 33). Baptism of infants would not have seemed strange to Jewish Christians for Jews practiced circumcision of boys eight days old (Luke 2:21). After infant baptism became the norm, adults who wished to join the church were usually instructed by a priest and baptized privately.

In the Catholic Church today baptism may be done by immersion or by pouring water over the head of the candidate. A bishop, priest or deacon is the usual minister of baptism. In case of necessity, anyone can baptize by intending

to do what the Church does and by pouring water over the person's head while saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The water and the prayers are the signs essential for a valid baptism, but in the full ceremony of baptism other signs are used. Blessed oil and chrism (oil mixed with balsam) signify the comfort and strength given by the Holy Spirit. A baptismal candle is a reminder that Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12). A white baptismal garment recalls Paul's words: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3: 27). Sponsors represent the Christian community and help welcome the candidate into the church.

Infant baptism has a long tradition in the Catholic Church going back to NT times. It is based on our belief that Christ wants to take into his arms the little children of today, just as he embraced the children of his time. It shows that we don't have to do anything to earn God's love, which is freely bestowed even upon infants who are cherished by God simply because they are God's children.

However, parents who have their children baptized should have a serious intention of bringing the children up in the faith. In the baptism ceremony Catholic parents make solemn promises to do just that. Parents should pray for and with their children, be the first teachers of the faith to their children by word and example, and lead them to the other sacraments of the Church. If parents have their children baptized and then do not raise them Catholics, they are denying the children the very life begun by baptism. Parents who do follow baptism with prayer, instruction, and good example give their children the assurance that they are loved and cared for by Jesus.

Vatican II recommended that the Church renew its way of receiving adult candidates. The result is the RCIA which has become the norm for the Church. The RCIA stresses formation in doctrine, liturgy, Church life, and service and involves the larger Church community in welcoming, instructing, helping and praying for the candidates.

## **Baptism and Salvation**

Baptism is the beginning of a process. Salvation is completed in heaven. Catholics are often asked: "Have you been saved?" or "Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior?" The questions themselves imply the notion that "once saved / always saved". The truth is there is no "biblical evidence" to support such a stance or view.

Salvation can be viewed as a ship on the water of life. The ship has been built, Christ is the skipper. We must be an active part of the crew. We are not just along for the ride. Jesus warns us in Matthew that "Not everyone who professes

Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom”, but rather one who is faithful. A faithful person will live their life accordingly. We trust that Jesus will see us to our final goal: ***union with the Father.***

## **Salvation of the Unbaptized**

In John (3:5) Jesus said “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.” There are some Christians who take this phrase literally and say that unless one undergoes this baptism they are condemned to hell. As Catholics we interpret these words in light of Jesus word at his ascension: “He who ***believes*** and is baptized will be saved: whoever does ***not believe*** will be condemned.” These words imply that those who hear the gospel **and refuse** to accept will be condemned. Many are unbaptized through no fault of their own. We believe that they can be saved. It has been the belief, since the early church that those who were martyred for their faith received ***“Baptism by Blood”***. Still others had the ***desire*** to be baptized, but died before they received it (***baptism of desire***). And there are those who ***“do what is right”*** but have never heard of Christ, but they know God, who is Love. They can be saved.

## **Confirmation:**

- I. The Sacrament of Initiation comes in three parts – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist which exist in a similar relationship:
  - A. In Baptism (1) we take off the old, sinful person and wash away Original Sin.
  - B. In Confirmation (2) we are anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit and filled with his sevenfold gifts.
  - C. Finally, (3) we are led to the Eucharistic banquet.
  - D. Pledging faith to God is a lifetime effort.
  - E. We celebrate God’s commitment to us and our faith in God’s fidelity.
- II. The Seven Symbols
  - A. Community
    1. Primary symbol as in confirmation into a community.
    2. Community is the sign of Christ’s presence in you.
  - B. Baptism
    1. Every confirmation begins with Baptism whether many years ago or at the same time.
    2. One source of the ritual is the Roman baths which were followed by the application of bath oil, water and oil.
    3. Means the sweet fragrance of God’s presence: Sanctifying

Grace – this presence of God in us is the Holy Spirit.

4. Confirmation is the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

#### C. Anointing

1. Chrism – Holy Oil – most solemn – also used in Sacrament of Holy Orders and in dedication of church buildings and other solemn blessings.
2. From ancient times oil has been a symbol of strength, healing and agility.
3. “Christ” means anointed. Christians are “the anointed ones”.
4. To continue the mission of the Messiah

#### D. Touch

1. From ancient times, imposing hands on someone or to extend Hands over their head was a sign of calling down the Holy Spirit
2. Done in all 7 sacraments.
3. Isaiah 11: 1 – 3
4. The prayer – “All powerful God, father of our lord Jesus Christ, By water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their Helper and Guide. Give them the spirit of **wisdom and understanding**, the spirit of **right judgement and courage**, the spirit of **knowledge and reverence**. Fill them with the spirit of **wonder and awe in your presence**.”

a. Prayer asks for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. & is a symbol of completeness, of boldness, and of the abundance of God’s love for us. They form Jesus’ personality:

- 1) His wisdom in His parables.
- 2) His understanding of the poor and sick.
- 3) His right judgement when tested by the Pharisees.
- 4) His courage to continue the journey to Jerusalem knowing fate.
- 5) His knowledge of God’s will.
- 6) His reverence for his heavenly Father.
- 7) And his awe before the wonders of creation – lilies, birds of air.

#### E. Words

1. Seal – Presider first says your name then says “Be sealed with The gift of the Holy Spirit.” God calls you by name – both your Baptismal name and your confirmation name.
  - a. Seal is the receiving of God’s mark, His seal. You are Permanently and eternally sealed as God’s anointed one
  - b. When asked “Who are you?” you answer with your name Choosing a “confirmation” name further affirms your Christian identity.
2. Gift – key word

- a. Confirmation is God's gift to you who believe.
- b. The Spirit is God's breath in you.
- c. A special divine life.
- d. We are united in the Body of Christ so we can call God our Father, our Abba or daddy.

F. Minister

1. In the early church the leadership was passed on from the original Apostles, to those we know as Bishops. They presided at all Sacraments.
2. As the Church grew the Bishops delegated to Presbyters, now called priests at many liturgical functions.
3. Today, the Bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation, but the local priest is given authority to confirm at the Easter Vigil.

G. Eucharist

1. The final and most important symbol because it is the repeatable part of Confirmation. The Holy Spirit comes upon us anew to strengthen us for service.

## **EUCHARIST, THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF LIFE IN THE SPIRIT**

"The Eucharist ... is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit." (*The Catechism* 1326, Article 3)

Eucharist is a memorial. A memorial is defined by its objective reality. It does not consist simply in a subjective memory or a recollection that is reality only in thought. It is an external, institutional manifestation of memory; it is a recollection definitively inscribed in history. With the Eucharist, Jesus has willed a new memorial. By transforming the Passover meal into the Eucharistic meal, he instituted a memorial that would forever reproduce what occurred at the Last Supper. The Passover (Exodus 12:1-13 and Exodus 12:21-28) recalled the night God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt during the time of Moses. Keep the Passover as "a memorial" which is meant to be remembered but also to be *relived*." All Israelites of all generations were delivered from Egypt. All shared in this foundational event. All were truly united in God's covenant family. The Eucharist is hope for a new *exodus*, but this time a forgiver of sin, a salvation (Catechism 1322-44).

"This is my body which will be given up for 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.

Do this in memory of me."

**1 Cor. 11:23-26, Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20**

This is a SACRIFICE which is a past event made present for us through the present act of the Eucharist! (Catechism 1356-72, 1390)

Christ is the sacrificial Lamb. In Old Testament the animal that was offered in sacrifice symbolized a person's giving of himself to God and thus strengthened his relationship with Yahweh. The offering presented in the Eucharist is the offering of Christ. It is always he, and he alone, who is the price paid for our salvation. Therefore in the Eucharistic celebration the body and blood of Christ are rendered present; it is they, with the person of the Savior to whom they belong, who are presented as an offering to the Father for the salvation of humanity. Christ offers himself. At the Last Supper, Christ made this offering by pronouncing the words of consecration over the bread and wine. Christ now works through the ministry of the Church and her priests. Owing to this visible mediation, he repeats in an invisible way the act of offering.

The sole difference between the two sacrifices (the mass and Calvary) consists in the "manner of offering." The sacrifice of the Cross was a bloody immolation, while the Eucharistic sacrifice is of a ritual order and excludes the

shedding of blood. Thus we can define the Eucharistic sacrifice as a sacramental sacrifice; and in this it differs from the sacrifice of the Cross.

Eucharist is a communal meal which nourishes the life of faith Christ willed that through this meal, the fruit of his sacrifice might penetrate human life in order to transform it. The meal is universal to social life. To eat and drink in someone's presence means to strike a relationship of familiarity. The sacred meal opens access to the divine intimacy. The Eucharistic meal communicates to the faithful the divine life itself, the life possessed by the Son and placed at the disposition of all who are destined to share his Sonship. God communicates his own life to human beings. The act of eating and drinking represents a deeper penetration of Christ's life into the interior of the individual. Thus this Eucharistic meal is a meal reliving the Last Supper. By feeding on the Eucharistic Body of Christ, we are transformed by His very life in us. He conforms us to Himself. In this sense, we really become what we eat. What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. (Catechism 1392)

Eucharist is full of ritual, story, and symbols that engage us. It uses elements of the natural world to help us experience the presence of God in our life and nourishes us for our mission to the world.

Christ is present in the sacrifice of the Mass. Christ is present in His body – the church – all the faithful gathered in the assembly. Christ is present in His holy word, proclaimed in the readings. After the priest's words and prayers, along with the assembly, the bread and wine on the altar really change into Jesus' body and blood. Under the appearances of bread and wine, Jesus' very body and blood are present Sacramentally. (John 6: 52-58)

***Transubstantiation:*** the "substance" of bread and wine becomes the "substance" of Christ's body and blood in sacramental form, while the appearances of bread and wine remain. The real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist is clearly enunciated in the Gospels, Paul and the early Church Fathers. The doctrine has developed as a result of certain controversies through the Church's history.

The Council of Trent underscored the fact that the form of presence is foremost a **mystery** of the faith. It is a form of existence that our words have difficulty expressing, but our intelligence can know, enlightened by faith. This means that Christ's presence in the sacrament will always be a mystery. It is above reason but does not contradict it. The Council affirmed that it is the tradition of the Church that decisively imposes the affirmation of the real presence. The Church believes that the entire person of Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity is present in the sacrament.

The celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the mass is the origin and consummation of the worship shown to the Eucharist outside Mass Not only are the sacred species which remain after Mass derived from the Mass, but they

are preserved so that those of the faithful who cannot come to Mass may be united to Christ, and His sacrifice celebrated in the Mass. .... There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that all the faithful ought to show to this most holy sacrament the worship, which is due to the true God, as has always been the custom of the Catholic Church. Even in the reserved sacrament He is to be adored. (Constitution on the Church)