

Catholic 101 – The Sacraments

What it means to be Catholic

Overview

Continuing our pursuit of what it means to be a Catholic we take a look at the Sacraments and their counterpart - Sacramentals.

The Sacraments

There are seven Sacraments, which are symbols of God's care and love for us. In the 5th century, Augustine said that a sacrament was "**a visible sign of an invisible grace**". Throughout the ages, each age elaborated upon the theological meanings.

Today we have come to see these sacraments in a much broader sense and they have great significance and meaning to all Catholics. That is, the sacraments are more than rituals in that they provide grace – which is the presence of God. They are also opportunities for the people of God to gather together and celebrate God's graces through these rituals.



The gift of God's grace is totally free and is always present. When we participate in and accept these sacraments, we fully express our community of service in Christ. When we are open to the gift they can and do effect a change in each of us.

The seven sacraments can be subdivided into the following 3 categories:

The Sacraments of Initiation

- **Baptism** incorporates us into the church through the sacramental of holy water using the formulae established almost 2000 years ago.
- In **Confirmation**, we continue our journey and further seal the sacrament of Baptism.
- In the Eucharist, we share in the most profound and mysterious of all God's gifts to us. Ordinary bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus

The Sacraments of Healing

- **Reconciliation** focuses on forgiveness and restores us to spiritual health. In sin, we are

separated from God and are brought back to Him through this sacrament.

- **Anointing of the Sick** focuses on the desire of God for the health of the human person. Healing can be both physical and spiritual.

The Sacraments of Vocation

- In **Matrimony**, we witness the covenant of love between a man and a woman which also symbolizes Christ's covenant of love for His church.
- Through **Holy Orders**, the church calls some men to be spiritual leaders and is a sacrament of service to Christ.

What are Sacramentals?

Sacramentals are visible sacred signs instituted by the church – similar to the sacred seven Sacraments – in that they signify spiritual effects through the intercession of the church. They help the faithful to receive the effects of the Sacraments. Sacramentals include religious signs, symbols, private and public devotions, prayers, gestures, rituals, music, images and manmade or natural made objects.

What do the Sacraments and Sacramentals mean to all Catholics?

If we read scriptures carefully we can find the source for each of the 7 Sacraments. I covered this in a previous 5-Minute Catechism. For Catholics this means that they are sacred and are of God rather than something invented by mankind. To Catholics it means that God so loved us that He wanted to touch us with His grace through the Sacraments.

We also see that Sacramentals help us to "see" the Sacraments in a visible way. When Catholics wear religious medals or ordain their homes with religious objects it means that in some special way we feel that God has touched us.