

## Your Journey of Faith

Create a timeline to represent your individual journey of faith. Mark and list a few (three to five) important moments or phases along your way.



Read and reflect on the Emmaus story in Luke's Gospel (24:13–35). It focuses on being open to recognize Jesus and on sharing the good news. This power comes from the eucharistic table: "He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35).

- Take time to reflect on your faith journey so far. What are your hopes and expectations as you continue along the path toward initiation?
- In what ways is your relationship with God changing as you seek him more fully?
- How can the Church and sacraments empower you to respond to Christ's call to live as a disciple?



*Journey of Faith for Adults: Catechumenate, C1 (826245)*

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Contributing writer: Gretchen L. Schwenker, PhD. Editors of 2016 *Journey of Faith*: Denise Bossert, Julia DiSalvo, and Joan McKamey. Design: Lorena Mitre Jimenez.

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### In Short:

- Each rite in the RCIA includes a period of preparation.
- There are different rites for catechumens and candidates.
- Each rite marks a significant step in the growing commitment to Christ.



## The RCIA Process and Rites

You've been exploring what it means to be Catholic—both in your relationship with God and in your life—and you have committed to taking the next step in the RCIA process.

The rites mark significant steps along this RCIA journey. Your RCIA team and sponsor will be by your side, guiding you. Members of the parish will support you through their encouragement and example. And you'll continue to make connections with others who are also traveling this path toward initiation into the Catholic Church.

*"As [John the Baptist] watched Jesus walk by, he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.' The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come, and you will see.'"*

John 1:36–39

### Periods and Rites

While each person's journey of faith is unique, the Church has established some standard steps marked by rites. Each rite is preceded by a period or stage during which participants receive the formation needed to fully celebrate the coming rite.

The RCIA rites take place at the beginning of Mass or after the homily. You'll stand near the altar with your sponsor and respond to the priest's questions. You may be nervous, so please listen to the words of the prayers as the community prays for you.

- You are on the path of conversion. How have you grown since the beginning of the RCIA process?



### Inquiry

As you moved through the inquiry period, you began to follow Jesus more earnestly, came to know his teachings and love more fully, and shared them with others.

### Rite: Acceptance

The **rite of acceptance** brings those desiring baptism into the order of catechumens. The rite introduces you to the parish community as members welcome you and pledge their prayers and support. You express your intention to follow the way of Christ, and your sponsor affirms your sincerity and ongoing conversion. As a catechumen, you will continue to grow in faith through study, reflection on the word of God, and prayer.



1. As the rite begins, you may stand at the church doors to symbolize your desire to enter the community.
2. The priest introduces you by name to those gathered and asks, "What do you ask of the Church?" You answer, "Faith," indicating your intention to live, learn, and love according to Christ's call and example.
3. The priest asks your sponsor to accept his or her role and then marks the sign of the cross on your forehead, symbolizing the love and strength of Christ that accompanies you. (An optional signing of other senses includes ears, eyes, lips, heart, shoulders, hands, and feet.)
4. The priest formally invites you to enter the church and participate in the Liturgy of the Word. (After the petitions, the RCIA group may be dismissed to reflect more deeply on the word of God.)

### Rite: Welcoming

If you're already baptized, you enter the catechumenate period as a **candidate** through the **rite of welcoming**. This rite may be celebrated separately or may be combined with the rite of acceptance.

- Who or what is helping you as you make this journey?
- In what specific ways are you growing in your relationship with Christ?



## Catechumenate

The catechumenate period is a time of focused learning on topics related to Catholic belief and practice, training you in the Christian life. It is a time of "more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation" (RCIA chapter of *The Rites, Volume One* [RCIA], 6).

*"[Jesus] saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him."*

Luke 5:27–28

### Rite: Election

Your parish may have a rite of sending to offer their prayers and support as you prepare to travel to your diocesan cathedral for the rite of election. During the rite of election you'll be presented to the bishop or his delegate.

The **rite of election**, usually celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent, affirms your readiness for the sacraments of initiation. You become a member of the **elect**, indicating you have been chosen—elected—by God and the Church. During the rite of election:

1. Your godparent(s) affirm your readiness, and the worshipping community voices its approval.
2. The celebrant asks if you wish to enter the Church. With the other catechumens, you answer, "We do."

3. At either the rite of sending or the rite of election, you sign your name in the *Book of the Elect*, expressing your "wish to enter fully into the life of the Church through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist" at Easter (RCIA 553).
4. The community prays for the elect, and the bishop offers a special blessing.

If you are already baptized, you will celebrate a rite named the call to continuing conversion.

*"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine."*

Isaiah 43:1

## Purification and Enlightenment

Usually coinciding with the season of Lent, this period is a time of reflection that focuses on your conversion as one of the elect, preparing to celebrate the Easter sacraments. Minor rites—such as the **scrutinies**, **presentation of the Creed**, and **presentation of the Lord's Prayer**—occur during this time, often at Sunday Mass.

*"Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'"*

Matthew 16:24

## Rites: Sacraments of Initiation

The Easter Vigil Mass is the "holy night," the "truly blessed night," the "night of grace" (The Easter Proclamation [Exsultet], *The Roman Missal*). The Church keeps vigil for the resurrection of Jesus and celebrates the central mysteries of our faith.

The elect are fully initiated into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass through reception of the sacraments of initiation. You will be baptized, sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, and receive Eucharist for the first time. From this point, if you are newly baptized, you will be called a **neophyte** (Greek for "newly planted"). If you have already been baptized, you will make a profession of faith and celebrate confirmation and Eucharist.

*"This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld."*

*The Easter Proclamation [Exsultet], The Roman Missal*

## Mystagogy

Initiation isn't the end; it begins your new life and the period of mystagogy. During the Easter season, you will experience being a full member of the Catholic Christian community. You will participate in the Sunday Eucharist and reflect on the meaning of the Easter sacraments.

- What part of, or moment in, this process interests you most? Why?





Sacraments Celebrate  
the Life of the Community


Each sacrament celebrates through ritual and symbols something happening in the lives of the celebrating community. For example, Eucharist strengthens the unity of Christians as they receive it. It celebrates God’s nourishing presence with us now.

While the sacraments benefit us as individuals, they also bring life to the entire Church. As members of Christ’s body, when we are strengthened as individuals, the family of God is strengthened as a whole (CCC 1134). Sacraments are more than just one-time liturgical celebrations. They serve as ongoing symbols of God’s love made visible to and through us.

Looking for and responding to Jesus’ signs of love will keep our connection to God alive and strong. Read about some of the ways people in the Bible responded to Jesus’ signs of love. Discuss what you find with the rest of the group.


- Mark 14:3–9      Luke 7:36–39
- Luke 10:38–42      Luke 5:27–32

• When you experience God’s love, how do you respond?




Reflect on the question below in your prayer journal:

• How might the sacraments help keep my heart open to God’s love?



**In Short:**



- A sacrament is a visible sign of God’s grace.
- The seven sacraments fall into three categories.
- Christ instituted the sacraments and made the Church their minister.

The Sacraments:  
An Introduction

How do you communicate your love to someone? We’re physical beings living in a physical world, so we communicate in physical ways. We experience life through our senses, and we communicate through our senses, too.

We can experience love, and love is real, but it’s not a physical object. Our expressions of love aren’t the same as love, but we communicate our love through them. Words, gestures, and physical objects become *signs* of our love.

Jesus realized that as physical beings, we need physical signs to comprehend the incredible reality of his love. When Christ uses physical signs—symbols we can sense and observe—to work in us, the Church calls it a **sacrament**.

The following Scripture readings will show you a few of the ways Jesus used the physical world to help his followers understand his profound love for them. As you read, list the way each reading shows this.

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| Matthew 8:1–3 | Mark 10:13–16 |
| Luke 9:12–17  | John 9:6–7    |
| John 11:35–36 | John 13:4–5   |
| John 20:21–22 |               |

What Is a Sacrament?

In the broadest sense, a sacrament can be any person, event, or thing through which we encounter or experience God’s presence in a new or deeper way. A sunset, a period of quiet prayer, a storm, the birth of a child, an intimate conversation with a close friend—all have the potential for revealing God to us in new and deeper ways.

In the broad sense, then, we can say that a sacramental experience is an encounter with God through human experience that somehow changes us. Virtually any human experience can provide us with such an encounter.



## Sacraments Are Expressions of God's Grace

In the fifth century, St. Augustine defined sacrament as "a visible sign of invisible grace." To understand sacrament, we also need to understand what **grace** means. Grace is the gift of God's love and presence into which we grow. It's "the help God gives us to respond to our vocation to become his adopted sons and daughters." God's "initiative of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits our free response in faith and commitment" (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, glossary, p. 514).

Grace is a relationship between God and us. Our side of the relationship develops gradually, but it's a response to a love that was always there. The gift of God's grace is totally free and ever present. What we do with that gift is ours to choose, and our eternal salvation is affected by our choice. We express and celebrate our acceptance of it in the sacraments.

• Reflect on a way God has loved you through another person, a specific event, or physical object.

• Give an example of how God has used you to show his love to others.

## Jesus as Sacrament

Those who first followed Jesus encountered God and God's presence in a new way through his human presence. Jesus was, for them—and is for us—the sacrament of God. In Jesus, we encounter God and God's presence. Jesus is the one great sacrament through which all other sacraments make sense.

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."*

John 1:1, 14

• How have you encountered God's presence and love for you through Jesus?



## The Church as Sacrament

In reflecting on this special relationship, the Church discovered its unique vocation: just as Jesus used his physical body to carry out the Father's mission, the Church uses its human members (the Mystical Body) as an instrument of salvation—as "sacraments" for the world. Sacraments are physical expressions of spiritual realities. As the body of Christ on earth, the Church is called to be a physical sign of the spiritual reality of Christ's ongoing presence in the world.

• How is your local parish community a sign of Christ's love to others?



## What Are the Seven Sacraments?

The official seven sacraments of the Catholic Church are baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance and reconciliation, anointing of the sick, matrimony, and holy orders. They are commonly grouped under three headings:

### Sacraments of Initiation

These sacraments celebrate and introduce us to the experience of the Christian life. While most Catholics receive these in separate ceremonies over several years, catechumens are initiated in one combined rite at the Easter Vigil.

- **Baptism** incorporates us into the Church and gives us a rebirth as daughters and sons of God.
- **Confirmation** is a continuation, ratification, or sealing of baptism. It helps us focus on the missionary dimensions of the baptismal commitment.
- **Eucharist** is the preeminent sacrament from which all others have meaning. In the Eucharist, Christ is most profoundly present in the Church, which gathers to hear the word of God and to share the nourishment of Christ's Body with one another.

### Sacraments of Healing

These sacraments celebrate and reveal to us God's power to heal us in soul and body.

- **Penance and reconciliation** focuses on forgiveness in our lives and on our acceptance of that forgiveness, which brings us back to spiritual health in the family of God after we have turned away.
- **Anointing of the sick** takes place as representatives of the community gather in faith to pray over and lay hands on those who are sick. The Church, like Christ, desires the health of the whole human person.

### Sacraments of Service

These sacraments celebrate the Christian vocation of service and consecrate us to minister within our own families and within the wider Church community.

- **Matrimony** (marriage) celebrates and witnesses the covenant of love between two people and symbolizes in that union Christ's covenant of love for the Church.
- **Holy orders** (ordination) is a sacrament of service by which some are called by God, through the Church, to be spiritual leaders.

You will learn more about each of the sacraments as you continue your study.

## How Do the Sacraments "Work?"

The traditional explanation is that the sacraments effect, or bring about, what they symbolize. For example, the pouring of or immersion into water in the rite of baptism symbolizes the soul being cleansed of sin. At the same time, God is making that cleansing happen. The laying on of hands and anointing in the rite of confirmation both symbolize and make happen the sealing of the recipient with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This occurs "independently of the personal holiness of the minister....The fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them" (CCC 1128).

## Sacraments Celebrate Christ's Life

The Church teaches that the seven sacraments were instituted by Christ. The sacraments come out of the story of Jesus' life and actions. For example, baptism calls to mind the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the way Jesus gathered a community around himself. It also reminds us of Jesus' command to carry the gospel to others and to baptize them. The Eucharist recalls the Last Supper. The Gospels also include accounts of other meals when Jesus invited those who were rejected by others to eat with him. Penance and reconciliation reminds us of Jesus' invitation to forgive one another, and of the way he forgave those who put him to death.

The sacraments also flow from Jesus' values and teachings. He raised basic values and experiences (forgiveness, concern for the sick, marriage, service) to new levels. He transformed ordinary human values into spiritual values by helping people see God's love made visible through them. As we celebrate the sacraments, we, like the first followers of Jesus, have the opportunity to encounter him in our acceptance of the values he lived and affirmed. In that encounter, Jesus is present to us as he was present to the early Church.

When Jesus instituted the sacraments and placed Peter at the head of the Church, he gave the apostles, and those who follow them in leading the Church, the mission and authority to minister and maintain the sacraments.



Baptism Is a Beginning

Baptism confers the character of Christ; it gives the baptized person a share in Christ’s life and entrance into his faith community. That’s why we must be baptized before we can celebrate any other sacraments.

Baptism is the beginning. The person who is plunged into the baptismal font emerges from the waters a “new creation” with a new life. This new life is the Holy Spirit making a home in us and giving us the power to know God and fulfill his plan for our lives.

“Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”

2 Corinthians 5:17

Reflect on the questions below in your prayer journal:

- What might a new life “in Christ” mean for you?
- If you’re already baptized, how are you growing in your life “in Christ”?

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Journey of Faith

In Short:

- Baptism is our entry into the body of Christ and family of God.
- Through baptism, we die to sin and rise to new life in Christ.
- Signs of the rite include water, oil, a white garment, and a lighted candle.



- How would your life change if you died to sin and lived for Christ.



Baptized Into the Body of Christ

For Christians, community has always been an essential part of life. Christ is at the center, and the community is built around him. Baptism is the way we enter that community and become members of the body of Christ, the Church. Once baptized, we share in the privileges and life of this community of believers.

Many people think of baptism as a private family affair, but being baptized connects us in a deep and eternal way with a much larger family: the family of God.

Heirs of God’s Kingdom

Baptism is the sign of salvation given to us by Christ to bring us into the kingdom of God (see John 3:5). A person enters “into Christ” (Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27) at the time of baptism, and the gift of the Spirit is given at that time.

“We are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

Romans 8:16–18

As adopted sons and daughters of God, Christians share in Jesus’ own relationship with his Father—a relationship so intimate that they, like Jesus, can freely and with every confidence address the Lord of heaven as “Father.”

The Sacrament of Baptism

The word baptism means “plunging.” At our **baptism** we plunge into the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus called his death and resurrection a baptism: “There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50).

This is the double action of our redemption: Christ going down into the grave for our sins and rising again, glorious, triumphant, immortal. Through baptism, Christians are united with his saving death and life-giving resurrection.

Saint Paul emphasizes that baptism is the beginning of a vital union with the risen Lord. The old sinful self passes away to be born anew and conformed to Christ.

Read the following passages and reflect on what they say about being buried with Christ, dying to sin, and rising to new life in Christ:

Romans 6:4                      Romans 6:6–7  
Romans 6:9–11



- As a child and heir of God, what riches will you inherit through baptism?

- What responsibilities come with those riches?



## Does a Protestant Have to Be Rebaptized in the Catholic Church?

The short answer is no. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* explains, "Baptism is a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been signed by it. Because of that unchangeable effect,...the rite of baptism is held in highest honor by all Christians. Once it has been validly celebrated, even if by Christians with whom we are not in full communion, it may never lawfully be repeated" (*The Rites, Volume One, General Introduction, [RCIA], 4*). Protestants wishing to join the Catholic Church are only rebaptized if there's significant doubt that they were baptized.

Baptism confers the character of Christ, making it permanent and irrevocable. As St. Paul wrote, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:1–6).

## What Happens to People Who Aren't Baptized?

Catholics believe that God's mercy can supply for the lack of baptism in a way that hasn't been revealed. Catholics believe that children who aren't baptized are entrusted to the infinitely kind and powerful love of God who wants all his children to be with him in heaven. Some people once held the theory that infants who die without baptism were excluded from heaven but spent eternity in a state of natural happiness called *limbo*. This theory has never been explicitly taught by the Church.

Catholics also believe in:

- "baptism of blood" (suffering death for the Christian faith before baptism)
- "baptism of desire" (those who "through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience," (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 16).

## What Happens During the Rite of Baptism?

The sacraments don't just tell us about something. They make the event happen. They are signs that work—that have effect. The sign accomplishes what it signifies.

In baptism, the essential sign is the pouring of water three times on the person's head or the immersion of the candidate in water three times accompanied by the words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

## Why Water?

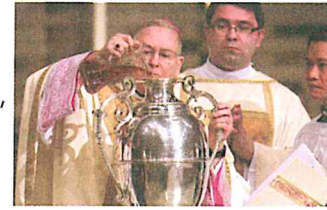
We know the importance of water for *life*. We know, too, that a person can live for weeks without food but only a few days without water to drink. Water is the main element that makes up living tissue—as much as 99 percent. No wonder our Lord chose water to represent the beginning of the new Christian life.

But water can remind us of *death* as well (flooding, drowning). This is another reason why our Lord chose water to represent the end of the old life and the beginning of the new Christian life.

The waters of baptism remind us that Christ has *washed us clean of sin* and reconciled us with God. In baptism, all our sins—even **original sin**, the fallen state of all human beings—are washed away. That's why the baptismal promises include renunciation of sin and a profession of personal faith.

## Anointing, White Garment, and Lighted Candle

If baptism is celebrated separate from confirmation, as is the case with infants and young children, the minister anoints the newly baptized with **chrism**, olive oil mixed with balsam and consecrated by the bishop. This anointing is a sign that God has "put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment" (2 Corinthians 1:22). It's a sign that the baptized person shares in the kingly, prophetic, and priestly mission of Christ.



After the water bath of baptism, the minister presents a white garment and a candle to the newly baptized. The *white garment* symbolizes becoming a new creation and being clothed in Christ: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).



The candle is lit from the Easter candle, which represents the risen Christ. The *lighted candle* is a reminder that Christ, the light of the world, is their light and that they must "live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).



## A Short History of Baptism

Bloody persecutions and heresies (false teachings) threatened new converts, especially those poorly instructed in the faith. The Church established the catechumenate, an extended period of preparation (sometimes lasting three or more years) to make sure candidates were sincere and well-grounded in the faith before baptism.

When Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity in AD 313, large numbers of people entered the Church. To adjust to these numbers, the Church began to drop the long catechumenate.

Until recently, adults interested in joining the Catholic Church received private instruction from a priest. After World War II, the Church in Africa addressed the need for more preparation for its new members by reviving the ancient catechumenate process.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) called for the restoration of the ancient catechumenate process for the whole Church. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* became mandatory in the United States in 1988. RCIA helps prepare those interested in joining the Catholic Church to follow Christ and integrates them into the life of the Church community.

*Baptism is "the door to life and to the kingdom of God."*

*RCIA, General Introduction, 3*

## Why Does the Church Baptize Infants?

The New Testament refers to entire households being baptized—and the Greek word for "household" includes everyone from infant to the oldest members of the family (see Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 1:16). By the second century, St. Irenaeus considered it a matter of course that infants and small children, as well as adults, should be baptized. The Church considers Jesus' invitation to baptism to be an invitation of universal and limitless love, which applies to children as well as to adults.

*"To fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized...so that they may ultimately accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized."*

*Rite of Baptism for Children, 9*



Think of how you feel when you give someone a gift. You're honored when the recipient uses the gift and disappointed if the gift goes unused. We might expect that God takes joy in our taking joy in his gifts.

• Which of these gifts do you need most in your life right now? Why?



In your prayer journal, reflect on how you're called to witness to your growing faith in Jesus Christ. Express both your feelings about witnessing to others and possible opportunities you may have to do so.



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# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Through confirmation, the Spirit empowers us as witnesses.
- Laying on of hands and anointing are actions that confer the sacrament.
- The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit help us live as Christ's disciples.



*Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim."*

Acts 2:1-4

Christ fulfills his promise to us as well through the sacrament of confirmation. In confirmation, we receive courage and other gifts of the Holy Spirit we need to be witnesses to Christ in our daily lives.

## The Sacrament of Confirmation

Many of us lack confidence when it comes to speaking to others about our faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus promised the apostles he would give them the courage needed to speak of him to others: "But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus kept his promise. When they received the Holy Spirit, the apostles immediately went out to preach the good news. If they had any reluctance or fear, it was forgotten.

*"When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy*

• How comfortable are you with sharing your faith?



## Confirmed for Witness

The word **confirmation** means "strengthening." The Catechism says the sacrament of confirmation "both confirms baptism and strengthens baptismal grace" (CCC 1289). Believers have the Spirit, our God-breath, from baptism. But the Spirit at confirmation is the breath behind speech, giving us the power to raise our voices in witness.

A witness testifies to what is known from personal experience. Christian witness is a believer's testimony to what they know: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is life and hope for all the world. Christians can witness in a variety of ways, from simple, everyday ways such as enthusiastic words or concern for others to dramatic ways such as dying for their faith as a martyr.



*"By the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."*

CCC 1285

*"Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."*

Matthew 10:19–20

## Other Confirmation Facts

"The effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost" (CCC 1302). The *Catechism* also points out that confirmation:

- "perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds" (CCC 1316).
- "imprints a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian's soul; for this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in one's life" (CCC 1317).
- "is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace" (CCC 1285).

## How Is the Sacrament Celebrated?

Confirmation is usually celebrated during Mass. Adults in the RCIA process are confirmed at the Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday. It's normally the bishop who administers the sacrament, but a priest may do so under circumstances such as at the Easter Vigil Mass.

The sacrament of confirmation is conferred by the *laying on of hands* followed by an *anointing* in the form of a cross with chrism on the forehead. As the candidate for confirmation approaches the bishop (or priest), the sponsor places a hand on the candidate's shoulder as a sign of presenting the candidate on behalf of the Christian community.

The power of the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands and praying for the gift of the Spirit. The laying on of hands is a biblical gesture that reflects the significance of human touch. In the Gospels, Jesus healed many people with a touch. When Jesus encountered two blind men, he "touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight, and followed him" (Matthew 20:34).

Following a prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit, the minister of the sacrament dips his thumb in the holy oil (chrism), makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one to be confirmed, and prays: "[Name], be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." Here, *gift* refers to the Holy Spirit. We are sealed with the gift of ("the gift that is") the Holy Spirit. Following this blessing, the bishop (or priest) and the newly confirmed exchange a sign of peace.

*"Anointing, in Biblical and other ancient symbolism, is rich in meaning: oil is a sign of abundance and joy; it cleanses (anointing before and after a bath) and limbers (the anointing of athletes and wrestlers); oil is a sign of healing, since it is soothing to bruises and wounds; and it makes radiant with beauty, health, and strength."*

CCC 1293

The Israelites anointed priests, and later kings, as a sign that they were chosen by God. Like these priests and kings, you're chosen by God. And like them, you are being anointed, chosen, for a purpose.

Anointing "signifies and imprints: a spiritual seal" that "marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service forever" (CCC 1293, 1296). Those confirmed "share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit...so that their lives may give off 'the aroma of Christ' (2 Corinthians 2:15)" (CCC 1294).

## Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The biblical origin of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit foretells the qualities of the Messiah:

*"The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD."*

Isaiah 11:2–3

The word *Messiah*—*Christos* in Greek—means "anointed." When we're anointed in baptism and confirmation, we "put on Christ" and the qualities of the Messiah become our qualities:

- **Wisdom:** Wisdom moves our vision into the future, giving us perspective and enabling us to see things with God's eyes. The gift of wisdom helps us see our joys and sufferings in the light of God's loving plan for us.
- **Understanding:** The world would be easier to understand if it came with instructions. Fortunately, God's gift of Easter life does come with instructions: the sacred Scriptures. Prayerful reading of the Bible helps us understand God's plan.

- **Right Judgment (Counsel):** This is the gift that helps us to make good choices—God's choices. The gift of right judgment helps us seek God's counsel, God's advice. Right judgments are made in the light of God's great Final Judgment.
- **Courage (Fortitude):** Courage enables us to face danger and overcome fear with confidence. Before performing a cure, Jesus often told his followers to take courage, take heart, be confident. The gift of courage enables us to see where our real strength lies—in God.
- **Knowledge:** The gift of knowledge helps us to know Jesus and to discern which things are important and which aren't. A good way to tell if we're really using the gift of knowledge is to examine whether the things we know lead us to charity in our actions.
- **Reverence (Piety):** Placing us at the foot of Jesus' cross, this gift helps us see our relationship to God: the saved and the Savior. It enables us to act in the light of this reality and to show our gratitude by our piety and devotion.
- **Wonder and Awe in God's Presence (Fear of the Lord):** It takes time and leisure to wonder and be amazed, to see God's beauty around us. We might recall the feeling of looking at something amazing in nature and saying "Wow!" That is this gift in action.



## Living the Eucharist

When St. Paul heard of abuses among the Christians in Corinth, he reproached them for celebrating the Eucharist (which means “thanksgiving”) without recognizing the body of Christ—the poor who go hungry while the rich get drunk (1 Corinthians 11:17–34). They were trying to remember Christ without remembering his body, which includes the poor. They wanted to celebrate the head without the body—a risen and glorified sacramental Christ separated from his actual body now.

Paul reminds us of an awesome responsibility. Those who come forward at Mass to receive holy Communion promise to treat all men and women as Christ would treat them, indeed, to treat them as Christ. The Eucharist is a celebration of Real Presence, a celebration that brings about unity and reconciliation in the whole body.

Saint Augustine said: “We must be what we have eaten.” We must be bread for others just as Jesus is bread given for us—broken and shared as nourishment for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

- In what ways do you see the Eucharist bringing unity and reconciliation to your local parish community?



Read Chapter 6 in the Gospel of John. Respond to the following questions in your journal:

- What message of hope, comfort, or challenge do you find in this reading?
- Choose one line from the Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:22–59) and explore its meaning for your life.



# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Catholic teaching on the Eucharist is based on Jesus’ words and actions.
- Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.
- Christians are called to imitate Christ by being bread for others.



## The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Some Scripture scholars believe that what most scandalized and infuriated the Jewish leaders about Jesus was that he ate meals with outcasts. He welcomed the despised tax collectors and sinners into table fellowship with him.

Centuries of tradition had given all formal meals among devout Jews a religious significance. Meals became symbols of the past when God had rescued their Hebrew ancestors from slavery and formed a covenant with them. Meals also symbolized the future when the faithful would share in a heavenly banquet.

Seeing Jesus sharing meals with outcasts, the chief priests and elders objected. They asked, *How could he not know who these people are? Doesn't he realize that by eating with them, he's offending God?*

Jesus was well aware of those he was eating with. The official list of “sinners” included not only thieves, murderers, adulterers, extortionists, and

prostitutes, but another group even further down the list—those Jews who worked for Gentiles (like swineherds and tax collectors). By eating with them, Jesus was, in essence, welcoming these outcasts back into the community.

The conviction that God was on their side was what upheld the Israelites in the midst of many afflictions. Then Jesus came along, claiming they were mistaken about God’s attitude toward those same people they refused to tolerate. Jesus constantly demonstrated how wrong they were by living out what he taught. It was clear that Jesus ate with these outcasts not just for private motives but in the name of the kingdom of God!

No wonder they were angry enough to have him executed.

*“Some scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus heard this and said to them [that], ‘Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.’”*

Mark 2:16–17

- What significance do you connect with sharing a meal?
- What kinds of outcasts would you invite to share a meal with you?



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## The Eucharist as Meal

The meals Jesus shared with sinners and outcasts add to the significance of his farewell meal with his apostles.

During this Last Supper, Jesus spelled out how the Father's forgiveness and the New Covenant, the promise of eternal life in Christ, would come about. He spelled it out by word, saying, "This is my body.... This is my blood of the covenant" (Mark 14:22, 24). He spelled it out in action through the sharing of bread and wine.

He also spoke of the price to be paid for the New Covenant to take place. This meal was a powerful message for the apostles. If they truly heeded his words and actions, if they lived up to what this meal required of them, they, like Jesus, should be ready, if necessary, to lay down their lives for others—as Jesus would do.

*"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.'"*

Matthew 26:26–28

## The Eucharist as Sacrifice

The meaning of sacrifice to people in biblical times is foreign to our culture and experience. A Jewish family coming to the Temple to offer sacrifice didn't bring gold but something connected with life, such as a living animal or fruits of the harvest. The sacrifice occurred when the priest put the fruits or blood on the altar and the people made an internal offering of themselves. The most important part of the sacrifice was what happened in people's minds and hearts—the offering of their lives to God.

Jesus' death on the cross was the greatest of all sacrifices. Jesus made an offering of himself. The Mass is the free sacrificial offering of Jesus.

But the Mass is not trying to replicate either the ancient sacrifices of the Temple ritual or the bloody event of Jesus' death. The ritual gestures performed by the priest at Mass aren't a stylized reenactment of the slaying of Jesus. The Lord could die only once; he will never die again. Rather, it's in celebrating this family meal, which we call the Mass, that we unite ourselves with Jesus' act of will and offer ourselves to God, mirroring the self-dedication Jesus had when he died on the cross.

*"This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience."*

CCC 614

- What does Christ's sacrifice for our sins mean to you personally?



## The Real Presence of Christ

Catholics believe that when Jesus said, "This is my body...This is my blood," he meant exactly what he said. For Jews, body meant the person, and blood was the source of the person's life. So Jesus was saying over the bread and cup, "This is myself," and we believe the consecrated bread and wine truly become the very person of Jesus.

The New Testament bears witness to the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Chapter 6 of John's Gospel is devoted to Jesus as the "Bread of Life":

- Jesus multiplies loaves and fish, a miracle that foreshadows his ability to "multiply his presence" in the Eucharist (see John 6:1–15).
- When he walks on water, he shows his divine power over nature, a power capable of changing bread into his Body (see John 6:16–21).
- Jesus teaches what is called his "Bread of Life Discourse" (see John 6:22–59).

*"Jesus himself tells us: 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.'"*

John 6:51, 54

Many disciples found these words about eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood intolerable and left him. But Jesus didn't say, "Wait, I meant that the bread *only represents* my body." Instead, he asked the Twelve, "'Do you also want to leave?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life'" (John 6:67–68).

Since the twelfth century, the Church has used the word **transubstantiation** to describe the change from the *substance* of bread and wine to the *substance* of the flesh and blood of Christ.

The *appearances*—the outer aspects like taste, color, and weight—remain just as they were before the consecration, but the deep realities have been changed into the Body and Blood of the living Christ.

When we receive holy Communion, we *receive the whole person of Christ*, as he is at the present moment—risen Lord, with his glorified body and soul, and his full divinity.

*"Dying for us did not satisfy you. You had to give us this sacrament as a companion, as food, as a pledge of heaven. You had to become a tiny baby, a poor laborer, a beaten criminal, even a morsel of bread. Only a God who loves us deeply could conceive such ideas!"*

St. Alphonsus Liguori

- How does Jesus in the Eucharist call to you? How do you feel about sharing in the Eucharist?





## How Often Should I Celebrate This Sacrament?

We're encouraged to do so often enough that when we really need the sacrament, it doesn't feel like an alien or strange experience. It should feel like coming home. Many people find more frequent, even monthly, celebration of this sacrament to be helpful. Catholics are obligated to confess serious sins at least once a year. Mortal sins must be named explicitly, number and type, in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation (Canon 988, CCC 1456).

Advent and Lent are traditional times when the Church beckons her children to know and celebrate God's mercy in this sacrament. Most parishes provide communal penance services or schedule extra times for reception of the sacrament. Parishes also offer regular times throughout the year, such as Saturday afternoons, and anyone can request an appointment with a priest.

## Ambassadors of Reconciliation

We're called to be God's instruments in removing barriers that keep individuals and groups from communicating with and caring for one another. Participation in this sacrament implies that as God freely forgives our transgressions, we also are willing to freely give and receive forgiveness. As we pray in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The sacrament of penance is a sacrament of both human and divine dimensions. All of us sin and all of us stand in need of forgiveness. Ours is a God who heals, a physician who binds up our wounded hearts, a loving parent who forgives and embraces the child who has wandered off. In this sacrament, God offers the same mercy and care to us.

- Name a way you can answer the call to forgive.



Begin to document a regular examination of conscience in your journal. Record the highs and lows of your ongoing journey toward right living and right relationship with God, others, and yourself.

- What are the stumbling blocks that lead me to sin?
- What sins weigh heavy on my heart?



# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- No sin is hidden from God, and all sins affect the community.
- Jesus forgave sins and gave his apostles the authority to forgive.
- Penance leads us from sorrow for sin to reconciliation with God and Church.



## The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

We often wish for chances to receive forgiveness, to redeem past hurts. Recall something you did recently that you regret. Shouting at a driver who cut you off on in traffic. Promoting yourself in a way that discounts the efforts of others. *How would you feel about asking for forgiveness?*

Or maybe you were the one who was hurt. Maybe you'd like to offer forgiveness.

Feeling the need to seek and extend forgiveness is common among people of good will. When thoughts, words, or actions have been intentionally unloving, relationships—between people and with God—are affected. Reconciliation is needed.

- How difficult is it for you to ask for forgiveness? To offer forgiveness?



## Sin Is a Refusal to Love

Sin isn't merely breaking the rules. Sin is understood in relation to love. God loves us so much, yet we often fail to return that love. **Sin** is the failure to respond to the love God has shown us in Christ Jesus.

Sin is first a matter of a selfish heart—a refusal to care—before it shows itself in actions. Because loving God and loving our neighbor are tied together, sin will always be expressed in and through our relationships. Sin can take the form of words, actions, thoughts, attitudes, and failure to speak or act with love.

In one option of the penitential act at Mass, we confess to sinning "in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do."

## The Effects of Sin

In the creation story found in the Old Testament Book of Genesis. Adam and Eve experienced harmony with self, God, each other, and creation until the serpent entered the Garden and they committed sin. In Genesis 3 (see verses below), we see the effects of disobeying God.

## Alienation From Self

After Adam and Eve sinned, their eyes "were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths" (7). Shame and uneasiness replaced openness and confidence.

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When we sin, the nakedness of trust is replaced by a cloak of defensiveness. No matter how attractive and pleasurable sin may seem, it has a diminishing and disintegrating effect on our inner selves.

### Alienation From God

They “hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (8). Fear and distance replaced the trust and intimacy they previously had with God. Uncomfortable in God’s presence, they hid.

When we sin, we distance ourselves from God, thinking we’re unworthy of God’s love.

### Alienation From Others

“The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it” (12). Adam blamed Eve for leading him into disobedience just as Eve blamed the serpent. As a result, Adam and Eve became alienated from each other. Our self-centeredness alienates us from others. Sin introduces division.

### How Did Jesus Minister to Sinners?

Jesus came to reconcile and save us. He communicated healing and mercy in a human way. He also gave his apostles the power to forgive sins: “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained’” (John 20:22–23). The Church continues Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation today in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

Forgiving sins was central to Jesus’ ministry. Read the following Gospel passages and consider how Jesus ministered to the sinner in each:

Mark 2:1–12      Luke 7:36–50

Luke 19:1–10      John 8:1–11

- How do you feel about God forgiving your sins?



## Types of Sin

Every sin falls into one of two categories:

- **Venial sin** occurs when we fail to show care for others. We may speak sharply, revel in gossip, or exercise inappropriate power over another. Venial sins don’t radically turn us away from God, but the habit of unloving acts can corrode our relationship to God. We must take venial sins seriously because they can weigh us down with bad habits.
- **Mortal sin** seriously breaks the relationship with God, neighbor, world, and self. Three conditions are needed for a sin to be considered mortal (see CCC 1857):
  - The act is wrong (grave matter).
  - The person knows it’s wrong (full knowledge).
  - The person chooses to do it anyway (deliberate consent).

## The Steps of the Rite

The sacrament of penance and reconciliation can be celebrated individually or in a communal service. Both rites include individual confession and absolution.

### Contrition

We prepare for the sacrament through an **examination of conscience**, reflecting on our lives and the choices we’ve made. We may use the Ten Commandments and teachings of Jesus to guide our examination. We reflect on how generous—or selfish—our responses to God and others have been.

To be forgiven, we must show contrition, sorrow for our sins, and be resolved to follow Jesus’ command to the woman caught in adultery, “from now on do not sin any more” (John 8:11).

### Confessing Sins, Accepting a Penance

We admit our sinfulness and confess our sins. Perhaps a Scripture passage made us aware of an area in which we haven’t loved enough. “Father, I’m like the older son in the gospel you read, and I’m not ready to forgive others.” Or, “I’m often impatient with my family.” Or, “I have sinned and I desire absolution.”

The priest will assign a **penance**. The act of penance—often a prayer, Scripture reading, or action—helps heal us of the sin and, in some way, makes up for the damage our sin caused.

### Why Confess to a Priest?

We don’t live in our minds alone; we need to express—with words, signs, and gestures—what’s in our minds and hearts. We need to see, hear, and feel forgiveness—not just think about it.

While sin may be secret, it’s never private. The Church has always believed that every sin affects the entire community. Since our sins wound and diminish the community, reconciliation must include the community, not just God. In the sacrament, the priest represents Christ (the head) and the Church (the members).

As Jesus’ stand-in, the priest isn’t learning anything new; God sees all our actions. And like God, he wants only to offer mercy. He is also bound by the seal of the confessional: “He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents’ lives” (CCC 1467). So in this sense only, all our sins remain private.

### Act of Contrition, Absolution

We express sorrow for our sins in an **act of contrition**. We may express sorrow in our own words, the priest may lead us in prayer, or we may use a memorized prayer like this one:

*My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen.*

The priest extends his right hand over us and makes the prayer of **absolution**. Hearing God’s forgiveness with our ears meets a basic human need. This prayer completes, seals, our change of heart. It signifies God’s forgiveness of us and our reconciliation with the Church:

*“...May God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”*

*Rite of Penance, 46*

When we leave the reconciliation chapel, we’ve been forgiven of the sins we confessed and the sins we unintentionally omitted. We perform our penance and make a new beginning.



## How Can I Participate in Christ's Healing Ministry?

While priests are the only ones who can sacramentally anoint the sick, ministry to the sick is a concern of the entire Christian community. Talk to a Catholic health-care professional, a hospital or hospice chaplain, a member of your parish who takes Communion to the sick and homebound, or someone who visits the sick in nursing homes. Ask them about their ministry and how it addresses the total person—body, soul, and spirit.

Find out how your local parish supports its sick members through service and prayer. Then answer the following questions in your journal:

- *How is God calling me to join in his care of the sick in my community?*
- *Who do I personally know who may benefit from a visit, card, or meal? Commit to reaching out to this person in the coming week.*



# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Jesus' healing ministry is the basis for this sacrament.
- The entire human being—body and soul—is touched by God's salvation.
- This sacrament includes the laying on of hands and anointing.



## The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Jesus was concerned about people's physical as well as spiritual health. In fact, the word *salvation* is derived from the Latin *salus*, which means "health." In announcing the good news of salvation, Jesus was declaring that God cares for us completely—body, soul, and spirit.

Jesus healed people's spiritual lives by assuring them that God forgives their sins and gives them the power to love and care for others. Jesus also healed people's ailments as a sign of God's power and as an example of caring for the entire person.

By healing people's bodies as well as their souls, Jesus showed that the entire human being is touched by God's salvation.

- *When has your physical health been affected by your mental health or vice versa?*



Throughout the Gospels, we read of Jesus' concern for the sick. Read the following healing accounts from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, then answer the questions below.

Matthew 8:5–13

Matthew 15:21–28

Luke 5:12–16

Luke 5:17–26

- *What types of ailments did Jesus heal?*
- *What was required in order for Jesus to heal a person?*
- *How were other people involved in these healing stories?*



## What Healing Ministry Did Jesus Leave the Church?

Healing was also essential to the mission of the apostles: "[Jesus] summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two....They anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (Mark 6:7, 13).

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Church continued to be a sacrament of healing. In the Letter of James, we read: "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14–15).

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A Redemptorist Ministry

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The sacrament of the **anointing of the sick** is based on Jesus' concern for the sick, his commissioning the apostles to heal the sick, and the healing ministry of the early Church.

## Faith in God's Care

To fully celebrate the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, it helps to recognize the following points:

### Anointing Is a Community Celebration

The *Catechism* states that when the sick are anointed, they should be "assisted by their pastor and the whole ecclesial community, which is invited to surround the sick in a special way through their prayers and fraternal attention" (CCC 1516) and "Like all the sacraments the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration....It is very fitting to celebrate it within the Eucharist" (CCC 1517).

A person doesn't have to wait to celebrate the sacrament until an illness is so grave that he or she is in the hospital. This sacrament, like all the sacraments, is a community celebration. When possible, celebrating it in the context of parish, home, or family is encouraged. The sick person has a better opportunity to appreciate the prayers and symbols of the rite when in her or his worshiping community.

Anyone who is hospitalized or homebound can receive the sacrament of the anointing of the sick as well. When possible, family, friends, or representatives of the parish community may be present.

### Sickness Involves More Than Bodily Illness

Tensions, fear, and anxiety about the future affect not only our minds but also our bodies. These illnesses can be serious. They can move us to ask for the healing touch of Christ in the sacrament of anointing.

Persons suffering from addictions can be anointed as can those who suffer from mental illness. Christ's power can be invoked in the sacrament when anxiety precedes surgery. The spouse or principal caregiver of an ill person may be anointed when he or she, too, is seriously affected by the illness.

### Anointing Heals Us Through Faith

*Does it work? Will I experience healing?* Yes, healing always takes place. However, that healing isn't restricted to mere physical healing.

When our attention is directed toward physical illness, it's natural to think of the effects of the sacrament in terms of physical healing. Sacraments, however, are celebrations of faith, expressions of who we are before God.

The healing following the anointing of the sick is a different kind of healing than a medicinal treatment or surgical intervention. Sacraments are acts of faith; they grace the whole person—body, soul, and spirit. The blessing over the oil for anointing asks God to "send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil....Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul, and in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction" (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, 123). The sick person may or may not experience physical healing, but he or she is strengthened spiritually in time of need. Reassurance of God's care and that of the community brings comfort and peace to the ailing and anxious.

### Value in Suffering

*"Christians feel and experience pain as do all other people; yet their faith helps them to grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering and to bear their pain with greater courage. From Christ's words they know that sickness has meaning and value for their own salvation and the salvation of the world. They also know that Christ, who during his life often visited and healed the sick, loves them in their illness."*

*Pastoral Care of the Sick, 1*

In this sacrament, we pray that the sick be healed in body, soul, and spirit. God alone knows what kind of healing the sick need most: healing a wound, converting fear into courage, lessening loneliness, turning confusion into insight.

The sacrament of anointing helps us gain insight into the meaning of human suffering. While it doesn't remove the mystery of human suffering, its celebration gives us a window into the mystery of a loving God who raises up the crucified Son to display his victorious wounds, sitting triumphant at the Father's right hand.

- When have you been healed physically, spiritually, or emotionally?
- How did your healing come about?
- What did you learn from your experience of suffering?



## How Is the Anointing of the Sick Celebrated Today?

Since this sacrament focuses on the healing of body, spirit, and soul, those who will be anointed are encouraged to celebrate the other sacrament of healing—the sacrament of penance and reconciliation—prior to the anointing service. The rite of anointing may be celebrated within Mass or outside of Mass with a Liturgy of the Word that instructs those gathered on the deeper Christian meaning of sickness and suffering and to celebrate the sacrament in renewed faith.

The *laying on of hands*, an ancient Christian gesture, symbolizes and confers the special grace of the Holy Spirit.

The priest *anoints* the forehead and hands of the sick person with the *oil of the sick*. The forehead is anointed as a reminder of the sign of the cross traced on the forehead at baptism. As the priest anoints the forehead, he says, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit."

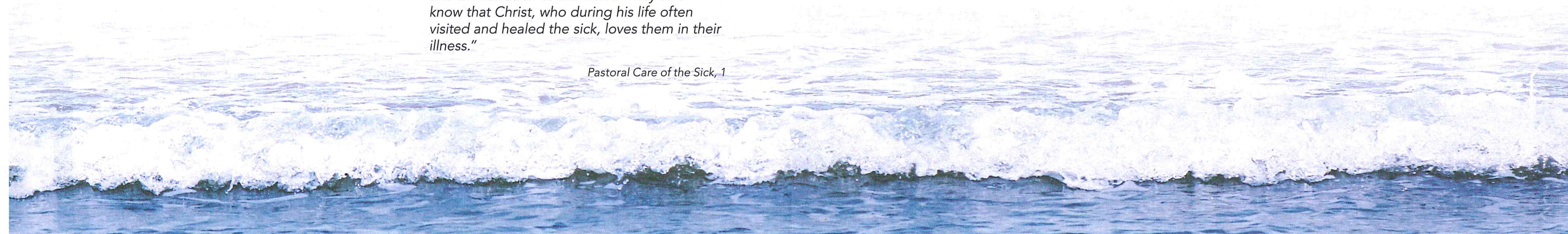
The anointing of the hands signifies the Holy Spirit meeting us in our personal situation. As the hands are anointed, the priest prays, "May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." The person answers, "Amen."

## How Often Can Someone Be Anointed?

Some need this sacramental grace to sustain them at a psychological or emotional level. Some need grace for an actual cure. Others, because of the extreme nature of the illness, need the grace to enter more deeply into the suffering of Christ.

This sacrament can be requested any time a person has an illness that might lead to death, is facing surgery, suffering the ailments of advanced age, or entering a new phase of illness. It's not unusual for a person to celebrate this sacrament more than once.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), anointing of the sick was used mostly for those close to death. The council restored this sacrament to its original purpose, changing its name from *extreme unction* (final anointing) to *anointing of the sick*.





## Natural Family Planning

Christ calls us all to lead lives of **chastity** according to our state in life. Being chaste means we “reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love” (CCC 2348–50). Within Christian marriage, a couple’s sexual expression of love is to be both exclusive and open to the dual love-giving (unitive) and life-giving (procreative) aspects of God’s design for the sexual expression of love.

The Catholic Church understands that couples may wish to space the births of children and may, for good reason, choose to limit the number of children they have. To do so, couples are encouraged to use various methods of **Natural Family Planning** (NFP).

NFP methods instruct and support the couple in reading and interpreting the biological signs of fertility and in applying this knowledge to achieve or postpone conception. No physical or chemical barrier is used to try to prevent pregnancy, allowing the total gift of self, including one’s fertility, to be shared through a couple’s lovemaking. These methods are completely natural and highly effective.

*“NFP ‘isn’t just biological; it has to do with the unity of the whole person: body and spirit. It’s about spouses learning the language of fertility and then living their marriages by it. It allows couples to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. That way, when their bodies say, ‘I love you,’ they’re all the more sure their hearts mean it.”*

Fletcher Doyle in  
*Natural Family Planning: Key to Intimacy*

- What does being chaste mean in your state in life?



Discuss the following questions with your spouse (if you’re married) or married friends (if you’re single). Record any insights you gain in your journal.

- How does the Catholic teaching about marriage challenge you? Why?
- How will you respond to this challenge?



### In Short:

- Matrimony reflects Christ’s paschal mystery and the love of the Trinity.
- Married love is an expression and sign of God’s love.
- Married love is self-giving, forgiving, faithful, intimate, and creative.



## The Sacrament of Matrimony

The Catholic concept of Christian marriage involves more than holding the wedding ceremony in a church. What makes a marriage Christian isn’t a Church blessing added to a legal contract.

Christian marriage is a relationship of life-giving love in which a man and a woman make the love of Christ present to each other and become a sign of the love of Christ to those around them. Through their love and faithfulness, they help each other grow in holiness.

Jesus gave the sacraments to his Church so that he could continue to touch us in our daily lives. In marriage, the relationship of the couple is the sacrament that reveals the love of God for all of us.

The following Scripture passages illustrate how Jesus honored marriage:

Luke 2:41–52

John 2:1–12

Matthew 5:27–30

Mark 10:2–12

Ephesians 5:22–30

- What can we learn about marriage from the life and teachings of Jesus?



## The Importance of Marriage

The Church didn’t invent marriage. At first, there wasn’t even a special Christian form of marriage. Through Jesus’ teachings, the faithful realized that marriage should be appreciated as a sacred vocation. The Church continues to praise the goodness of family life and to teach that married love is a sharing in God’s love.

Christians see marriage as a sacred covenant, a way of joining the shared lives of a couple with God. It’s a way of living that adds richness and value to married lives—and serves as a witness of God’s love.

- How might Christian marriage benefit the spouses, family, Church, and society?



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## Signs of God's Love

We understand the true nature of married love only when we realize that it comes from God, who is love. Catholics believe that a marriage between two baptized Christians is sacramental—a sign of Christ.

In the rite of marriage, the Church recognizes “the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that ‘makes the marriage’....” The partners mutually give themselves to each other: ‘I take you to be my wife’—‘I take you to be my husband.’ This consent that binds the spouses to each other finds its fulfillment in the two ‘becoming one flesh’” (CCC 1626–27). This consent must be freely given.

The couple may exchange rings as a sign of their love and fidelity to each other and as a reminder of God's never-ending love and faithfulness.

A married couple makes Christ present to each other. That's why the ministers of the sacrament of matrimony are the husband and wife.

*“We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.”*

1 John 4:16

## Characteristics of Love

Married couples find many opportunities for learning acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness. In a Scripture passage used at many Christian weddings, St. Paul offers several characteristics of love: “Love is patient, love is kind...” (see 1 Corinthians 13:4–8). We find additional definitions of love throughout Scripture as God reveals his love for his people. Based on St. John's assertion that “God is love” (1 John 4:16), we learn from God's love how to love each other.

## Love Is Self-giving

Founded on God's giving of himself, married love is based on giving. Total loving means total giving of oneself “freely and wholeheartedly” (*Order of Celebrating Matrimony*). Married love is a choice to love our spouse unconditionally and requires sacrifice for the good of the other. In choosing to love, we make the decision to give without resentment, forgive completely, and put the other's needs before our own. Two people joined in marriage become one as they share their unique gifts for the sake of the other.

- When have you witnessed or shared self-giving love?



## Love Is Forgiving

God's mercy and forgiveness is reflected in the way a couple reconciles differences, forgives hurts, and heals each other. Willingness to reconcile again and again is an example of the desire for reconciliation God has for us.

- When has willingness to forgive or to ask for forgiveness strengthened your relationship?



## Love Is Faithful

A couple promises on their wedding day to love and honor each other as husband and wife all the days of their lives. This promise isn't just for days that go well or seasons of life that are easy. It's a lifelong commitment that doesn't end.

God's faithfulness is evident in the commitment a couple makes to love each other for a lifetime. It means affirmation instead of criticism, openness instead of dismissiveness, communication instead of silence, collaboration instead of demands. Modeled on God's faithfulness, married love accepts, affirms, looks for the good, and encourages personal growth.

- What married couple models faithful love? How might you affirm or thank them?



## Love Is Intimate

God's love is passionate, joyful, and intimate, qualities reflected in a couple's passion for each other. The intimacy enjoyed in marriage is sexual, emotional, and spiritual. The marital embrace expresses the love of husband and wife and also makes their love grow. Sexual relations in marriage are a way to enrich each other through mutual self-giving. Their love makes them not two persons but one body. Married love that leads to growth in intimacy mirrors the love God has for us.

- How are couples called to be intimate beyond the physical? What might spiritual intimacy look like?



## Love Is Creative

Sharing in God's creative love, a couple is privileged to share in the most exalted part of God's creative work—the creation of another human being. Their generosity and love is a reflection of the Creator's love.

An essential dimension of marriage is openness to fertility and children. This means much more than the act of conception; it's the encouragement and support given to each other during the raising of children. Christian couples must be willing to bring life through each other and mutually share in the work of nurturing that life to adulthood.

The fruitfulness of marriage isn't limited to children. If a couple is unable to have children, “their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice” (CCC 1654).

The sexual difference and complementarity of man and woman are part of God's design. Based on its understanding of God's design and will, the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is to be between one man and one woman.

## Love Is Oneness

There is strength and beauty in a couple whose members are truly one. Each person is distinct, yet together they're a more complete whole. God is best revealed in marriage because God is relationship. In the blending of two into one flesh, we can catch a glimpse of the unity and mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Couples give flesh to Christ's love through intimacy and belonging. The Church and the community have a responsibility to help all married couples live out their vocation and covenant. One way the Church does this is through marriage-preparation and enrichment programs.

## What Does the Church Teach About Divorce

Jesus revealed God's intention for married love: “A man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Mark 10:7–9).

Catholics believe a sacramental marriage between Christians can never be dissolved. Although Christians may get a civil divorce, the Church still considers the couple to be married. They cannot remarry in the Church without a decree of nullity, commonly called an annulment.

Divorced Catholics who haven't remarried remain full members of the Church. Those who have remarried outside of the Church are encouraged to seek an annulment through a process many find both healing and merciful. If an annulment is granted, marriage within the Church is again possible.

An annulment isn't a Catholic divorce. It's an official Church recognition that the marriage wasn't a true marriage—not a sacrament—in the first place. A decree of nullity in no way affects the legitimacy of children.