

Sacraments of the Catholic Church

Sacraments are central for Catholics. They help us meet Jesus, the Son of God, who comes to us through the seven Sacraments of the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion (*known as First Holy Communion for first timers*), Reconciliation (*or Confession*), Marriage (*or Matrimony*), Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick (*traditionally also known as the Last Rites*). The seven Sacraments are divided into three categories: Sacraments of Initiation, Sacraments of Healing and Sacraments of Service. The first three of these Sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion—are called the Sacraments of Initiation, because the rest of our life as Christians depends on them.

The Latin word *sacramentum* means “a sign of the sacred.” The seven Sacraments that we have in the Catholic Church are ceremonies that point to what is sacred, something significant and important for us Catholics. They are special occasions for experiencing God’s saving presence in our lives. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us (#1131).

Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church

Baptism: The sacrament of Baptism is the beginning of life—supernatural life. It is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons and daughters of God; we become members of Christ; we are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission.

Reconciliation (*Confession*): The sacrament of Reconciliation is a sacrament by which a person renews a love relationship, a friendship with God and the community. It is a Sacrament in which a person makes peace with God and one another. In other words, in the sacrament of Reconciliation we encounter God’s forgiveness each time we go to Confession. God forgives the sins we have committed after our Baptism, but only if we are heartily sorry for them, sincerely confess them, and are willing to make satisfaction for them.

Eucharist: The Catechism teaches us that the Holy Eucharist is both a Sacrifice and a Sacrament. As a Sacrifice the Holy Eucharist is the Mass. The Mass is that divine action in which Jesus, through the priest, his agent, changes the bread and wine into his own Body and Blood and continues through time the offering which he made to God on Calvary—the offering of himself for humankind. The act by which we receive the Holy Eucharist is called Holy Communion. As we receive Christ’s Body and Blood, we also are nourished spiritually and brought closer to God.

Confirmation: The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches the following about the Sacrament of Confirmation: “Baptism, the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, and that Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For by the Sacrament of Confirmation, the baptised 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.”

Confirmation strengthens our Christian commitment and deepens the baptismal gifts in us; it completes the Sacrament of Baptism. Confirmation perfects our baptism and brings us the graces of the Holy Spirit that were granted to the Apostles on Pentecost Sunday. This is why the Sacrament of Confirmation is most often associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In a word, Confirmation is a Sacrament of empowerment. It gives us the strength to follow Jesus and to become involved in the mission which Christ Jesus left to the Church. It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend our faith by word and action. Besides, the Sacrament of Confirmation allows us to enter into full membership in the Catholic Church. It makes us full members of the church family.

Marriage: Marriage, a lifelong union between a man and a woman for procreation and mutual support, is a natural institution, but it is also one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Up to the time of Christ, marriage, although a sacred union, was still only a civil contract between a man and a woman. Jesus, however, took this contract, this exchange of marital consent between man and woman, and made the contract a conveyor of grace. He made marriage a sacrament, the sacrament of Matrimony among Christians. As a sacrament, the Sacrament of Marriage reflects the union of Jesus Christ and his Church.

Holy Orders: The Sacrament of Holy Orders is the continuation of Christ's priesthood, which he bestowed upon his Apostles. It is the Sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time. There are three levels to this sacrament: the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate.

Anointing of the Sick: Traditionally referred to as Extreme Unction or Last Rites, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is administered to those who are seriously ill, facing surgery, or elderly. Through this Sacrament the Church prays for the recovery of their health and for spiritual strength.