

Receiving the Sacraments

The Catholic Church teaches Seven Sacraments:

1. Baptism forgives all personal sin, takes away original sin (but leaves concupiscence, a tendency toward sin), infuses sanctifying grace, and is necessary for salvation. Baptism imprints in the soul a character, a certain spiritual and indelible Sign, and so can only be received validly once. Persons of any age may be baptized, from infant to adult. Only the baptized may receive the other Sacraments. The grace received by baptism may be lost by the commission of an actual mortal sin.

2. Confession forgives any sins committed after Baptism. But if you are not repentant, then you are not forgiven. Only a Bishop or a priest can absolve sins in Confession. An actual mortal sin occurs when one does something that is seriously immoral, with full deliberation and knowledge. To be forgiven, admit your sin in Confession, with true sorrow (regret for sin) and repentance (a turning away from sin, toward the love of God and neighbor). Confession restores the state of salvific grace lost by actual mortal sin.

3. Communion (the holy Eucharist) may only be received by baptized Catholics who are not aware of any unconfessed actual mortal sins. Reception of this Sacrament is a sign of unity with other Catholics within the teachings and practices of the Catholic Faith. Those who obstinately doubt or deny any of the required beliefs of the Catholic faith are not permitted to receive this Sacrament (cf. Canon Law 751, 1364). When consecrated, the bread and wine of the holy Eucharist becomes literally the body and blood of Jesus Christ, such that all of Christ is present: His human nature and His Divine Nature, united in One Divine Person.

4. Confirmation imprints in the soul a character, a certain spiritual and indelible Sign, and so can only be received validly once. Confirmed persons are called to profess faith in Christ publicly, and to spread the Gospel message, in accord with the ability and circumstances of their life. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. Receiving this Sacrament, with Baptism and Communion, completes a person's initiation into the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

5. Holy Matrimony is a Sacrament established by Jesus Christ for the benefit and salvation of the husband and wife, and their children. Marriage as a Sacrament differs from ordinary marriage; it is a true source of grace for the spouses, and unites husband and wife in a holy bond before God. True marriage is only between one man and one woman, and only death can break the bond of this Sacrament. Marital relations is a fundamental part of this Sacrament: "May marriage be honorable in every way, and may the marriage bed be immaculate." (Heb 13:4).

6. Holy Orders is the means that Christ uses to provide the faithful with true shepherds after His own heart; this Sacrament imprints in the soul a character, a certain spiritual and indelible Sign, and is received only once, but in three degrees: deacon, priest, bishop. The Pope is both a bishop and the leader of all bishops; he is the successor to Saint Peter. By ordination, a bishop becomes a true successor to the first Apostles. Priests are ordained to be assistants to the bishops, and to offer the faithful the Gospel and the Sacraments. Deacons assist both bishops and priests; they are appointed to serve the faithful in works of mercy and to preach the Gospel (cf. Acts 6). Ordained persons have a role in the Church that is not given to the laity. Consecrated persons (monks and nuns) are non-ordained members of the laity.

7. Anointing of the Sick (or Extreme Unction or Last Rites) anoints chronically ill, sick, injured, or dying persons, offering forgiveness from sin, abundant grace, and healing in body and soul. "Is anyone ill among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And a prayer of faith shall save the infirm, and the Lord shall alleviate him. And if he has sins, these shall be forgiven him." (James 5:14-15).

All Seven Sacraments were established by Jesus Christ during His Ministry and have been in use by the Church from its inception. The Sacraments provide grace, from the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross, to the faithful throughout their lives, from birth to death. Reception of the Sacraments in accord with the teaching of the Church is the ordinary means of salvation for all the faithful.