

Class #6: Liturgy and Sacraments

Class Objectives:

To explore the Paschal Mystery, to become familiar with the Liturgical Yearly Cycle, and a deeper appreciation for the Sacraments.

Resources:

Vatican II. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Lumen gentium*.

Catechism, #1066-1199.

Handbook for Today's Catholic.

Book of Blessings.

"Sacraments" in NDCS, 834-844.

"Liturgy" in NDCS, 602-610.

Martos, Joseph. *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*. Expanded ed. Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1981.

Overview:

The seven Sacraments celebrated by us in the Liturgy of the Catholic Church are distinct encounters with Christ. The Sacraments are a revelation and an experience of Jesus' presence in the heart of the individual and community. This celebration is a way that we the Church experience the presence of Jesus' saving actions that flow from his life and ministry.

Jesus, according to Vatican II, is the *sacrament* of the Father. The Church is a kind of *sacrament* of Jesus, but only as it participates in the teaching and mission Jesus. The *liturgy* is the "work of the people," and for that reason everyone is called to "full, active, conscious participation" in the liturgy. We hope to continually grow in our experience and understanding of the liturgical year. Through the celebration of the liturgy and sacraments the Church continues to incarnate Christ in the world and carry on his mission for the transformation of the world.

Core Content:

1. **The Liturgical Year** is the cyclical celebration of the great mysteries of our faith: the Incarnation, Redemption, and the Sending of the Spirit. These are celebrated through the liturgical seasons of Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter, and Pentecost.

The periods of Ordinary Time, Holy Days, the feast days of Mary and the Saints, are incorporated throughout the liturgical cycle. Celebration of the liturgical year deepens our participation and experience of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Triduum, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil, is the high point of the liturgical year with its intense focus on the Paschal Mystery. Our living out of the liturgical cycle is a primary source of grace to be and become Christ in and for the world.

2. Paschal Mystery The liturgical cycle is a school of spirituality by which we deepen our experience of the dying and rising of Jesus, which is the Paschal Mystery. Our celebration of the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. We are transformed by our holy communion with Christ and one another and empowered to bring this self-giving love to the world.

3. Historical Development of the Sacraments

As a way to extend in time the saving work and mission of Jesus, the Church developed the seven Sacraments. They are Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Order, Matrimony, and the Anointing of the Sick and Dying. These actions are all rooted in the life of Jesus.

The followers of Jesus, gathering to remember him, experienced his presence. These gatherings of the early community became the foundation from which the Sacraments developed and evolved. [Jack has a handout on the historical development of the Sacraments. It should be used for this class]

4. What is a Sacrament? A Sacrament is an experience of God's presence in our lives through the medium of familiar objects like water, wine, bread, oil, and human touch. These ordinary things take on a deeper dimension of meaning as they become doors to the sacred through the ritual of the Church. They are the unique signs and symbols of God's loving presence and action in our lives. The Sacraments are to be received with faith and they also give faith. "The purpose of the Sacraments is to sanctify men and women, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God." (Sacrosanctum Sanctum Concilium, #59).

5. Jesus is the sacrament of God, that is, Jesus is the human face of our Creator. Jesus reveals to us that God is love, that our God is rich in mercy, and forgiveness, and is forever faithful. The Church is the sacrament of Jesus, that is, it carries on the mission of Jesus to reveal our loving God and continue the transformation of our hearts and of the world.

6. Grace is the self-gift of God to us. Grace comes to us through the Sacraments, through the community, the events of our lives, and especially through our loving relationships. God's presence, that we call grace, transforms and empowers us to love God, our neighbor, our enemy, our self, and all creation.

7. Sacramentals are sacred signs that point to and reveal God's presence. Any object or event can carry divine significance. The Christian tradition is rich in these signs and symbols that arise from and take on the spiritual meanings of different cultures. Some examples are the use of holy water, sacred images, crucifixes, and blessings. "Sacramentals derive from the baptismal priesthood; every baptized person is called to be a "blessing," and to bless." (CCC Part 2, Ch. 4 #1)

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the meaning of the Paschal Mystery? How is it a template for the Christian life?
2. What is the liturgical cycle? How is the cycle a "school of spirituality"?
3. Why are rituals and symbols important for religious expression/experience?
4. What is a sacrament?
5. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is the sacrament of God?
6. Is the Church a sacrament?
7. How is the sacraments related to the expression "Love God and neighbor?"
8. Does the term "grace" mean anything?