

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This week, I'm going to begin a series looking at the **Sacraments**. The Sacraments are *key* to the life of the Church. Here we find a way into the very Heart of God. You remember, of course, that there are seven Sacraments: **Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Confession, and Anointing of the Sick**. But what are Sacraments, though? Some of you will remember the Baltimore Catechism definition of a Sacrament:

**“An outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace.”**

It starts with an **outward sign**. The outward signs of the Sacraments are things like water, oil, bread, wine, words, actions, touch. These are points of contact with God through our senses, for we are bodily people. It is interesting to note that we are NOT spiritual beings; we are HUMAN BEINGS. The Angels are spiritual beings, for they are only and completely spirits. As human beings, we are both body and spirit. The body wasn't just an add-on that God gave us. Rather, the body is good. God loves the body so much that when He came to redeem us from sin, He came not just in the spirit, but in the body. That body was a normal body, like yours and mine. That body spit-up on itself and needed diaper changes as an infant. That body went through the usual changes of puberty as He grew into adolescence. That body suffered from fatigue and pain – just like yours and mine. God chose then, after His death, to rise in the body and ascend into Heaven with the full human nature so that our souls **and our bodies** would be with God forever. If we are under the illusion that we are just trying to be “spiritual” and ignore our bodies, we fall into the ancient heresy of dualism (this follows also for when we try to live as if we were only bodily, instinctual animals, ignoring the spiritual part of us). There is a technical, theological term for when we separate out the body and the soul... it is called *death*.

All of this is to say that the body is good and essential part of our existence. The body is not just biological; it is also *theological* – it tells us something about God. As such, God chooses to reveal His love to us in bodily ways in the Sacraments. St. John Paul II said this:

**The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus be a sign of it.** (*Theology of the Body*, 19:4)

Only the body is capable of making visible, tangible the spiritual part of us, and also God's reality! So we eat, we drink, and we see in this how much we need God, we hunger and thirst for God. We hear the words of absolution and know the God of the universe truly forgives our sins and draws us back into relationship with Him. We smell the perfume of the Chrism and know that the fragrance of Christ has now infused our souls in Baptism, Confirmation or Ordination. We feel the loving touch of anointing, and know the God of the universe is healing our bodies and souls. We see the very Presence of God in the Eucharist, and know He desires to be close to us!

The Sacraments are outward signs, points of the touch of God. He give us His Grace, the free-gift of Himself, so that we can be in relationship with Him, so that we can call God: “*Abba*, Father, Daddy.”

Another definition of a Sacrament is a **sign that makes real what it signifies**. If, for instance, a stop sign made real what it signifies, then we wouldn't be able to make a “rolling stop”! We would come up to the intersection, and would be stopped in our tracks! **The Sacraments make real what they signify**. Water is poured upon a head to signify cleaning – and the soul, which we cannot see, is truly cleansed of all sin. The words are spoken, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and that person now truly has the life of God – the whole Trinity – living within!

We are often afraid of transcendence. We often avoid believing that we are called to Divine Life. We look at our brokenness and say, “Not me.” The truth is that God has poured out His free gifts in the Sacraments, and these raise us beyond the natural life to supernatural life. We (I truly mean “we” – me, too!) need to wake up to the reality that surrounds us – that **God has made us for greatness!** And He has poured upon us all the gifts we need in the Sacraments in order to attain that greatness! The Sacraments truly pour God's gifts upon us, but we *must* be open to these gifts; we *must* allow God to work in our lives. May we open our hearts to God's action in us today.