

The sacrament of Holy Orders is the gift of the Holy Spirit and grace for the exercise of sacred ministry in the Church through prayer and laying of hands by bishops. Jesus said, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I ordained you to go and bear fruit” (*Jn 15:16*).

The sacrament is administered to baptized men in whom the Church discerns a special vocation in three successive modes. One is first ordained a deacon, who represents Christ the servant of those in need and assists in public worship. Deacons may be ordained priests to represent Christ in preaching, celebrating, blessing and absolving in the Lord’s name. Priests may be ordained bishops, receiving in episcopal consecration the fullness of the priesthood of Christ with a calling to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church.

### What is Holy Matrimony?

St Paul noted, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery [in Latin, *sacramentum*]—but I am talking about Christ and the Church.” (*Eph 5:31-32*).

This is Holy Matrimony, the sacrament of Christian marriage. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, (*Gen 2:18,20-25*) and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (*John 2:1-11*). Its central purpose has been to create a haven for the procreation of children and its central meaning is to reflect the love between Christ and his bride, the Church.

Speaking of the husband and wife joined in marriage by their conjugal union, Jesus said, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (*Mat 19:6*).

### What is sacramental Confession?

“The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (*BCP, p 855*). Jesus carried out this mission by releasing people from their sins and declaring God’s forgiveness to them. When Jesus ascended into heaven, his desire was that this ministry of reconciliation would continue in his Church. This happens through sharing the gospel, forgiving one another, and the sacramental confession of our sins to God with absolution from a priest.

Before he ascended into heaven, the risen Lord breathed on the apostles and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (*John 20:22-23*).

### What is the Anointing of the Sick?

Jesus is known as the “Great Physician.” When Jesus visited the towns and villages of Judea and Galilee proclaiming the Kingdom of God, he would often heal their sick and forgive people of their sins. In this way, the people could experience the kingdom breaking out in their midst. This healing ministry continued in the early Church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

St James wrote, “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the *presbyters* of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” (*James 5:14-15*). Unction “is the rite of anointing the sick with oil, or the laying on of hands, by which God’s grace is given for the healing of spirit, mind, and body” (*BCP, p 861*).

Anointing the sick is a valuable tool in strengthening their faith, sharing God’s grace, and reconnecting them to the Church.

*A newcomer’s guide to . . .*

# The Sacraments



*By Fr. Timothy Matkin, SSC*

**“Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men’s profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God’s good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.”**

*—Articles of Religion, XXV. ‘Of the Sacraments’*

## What are sacraments?

The sacraments are “Holy Mysteries” (from the Latin, *sacramentum*; see *Eph 5:31-32*). The term came to be applied to seven biblical rites through which the ministry of Jesus is carried on in his Church. All the glories of the risen Christ have ascended into the sacraments. In the classic Anglican definition, sacraments are “outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace” (*BCP*, p 857). They are sure signs that God is at work, using material things to communicate his spiritual gifts.

Grace (*charis* in Greek) is God’s undeserved favor toward us; by grace God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills. Christian believers are “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (*Rom 3:24*). Grace cannot be earned; it is a gift. If it were merited, then “grace would no longer be grace” (*Rom 11:6*).

The Church speaks of Baptism and the Eucharist as the two “Sacraments of the Gospel.” The five other sacramental rites differ from these two dominical sacraments in that, “although they are means of grace, they are not necessary for all people the way that Baptism and the Eucharist are” (*BCP*, p 860). Some are sacraments of vocation, like Confirmation, Ordination, and Matrimony. Others are sacraments of healing, like Penance and Unction.

## What is Holy Baptism?

Baptism, the “washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (*Titus 3:5*), is the beginning of the Christian life whereby we are born again and incorporated into Christ through his mystical Body, the Church. The outward and visible sign is washing with water and the words “I baptize

you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The inward and spiritual grace is union with Christ, the removal of sin, and the infusion of sanctifying grace.

In Baptism, we receive new life in Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit. “We have been buried with him by baptism into death,” St Paul wrote, “so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (*Rom 6:4*). The basis of this new life is faith in Jesus Christ, expressed in the ancient words of the Apostles’ Creed.

## What is the Holy Eucharist?

To sustain the supernatural life given at Baptism, Christ gave us supernatural food to nourish us in the Holy Eucharist. The outward and visible sign is bread and wine, over which is spoken the Lord’s words, “This is my Body” and “This is my Blood.” The inward and spiritual grace is the true food and drink of the Body and Blood of Christ, broken on the cross, raised from the dead, and ascended into heavenly glory. Holy Communion nourishes our union with Christ. As Jesus said, “My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (*John 6:55-56*).

This rite was commanded by Christ for the “continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection until his coming again” (*BCP*, p 859). The Eucharist is called a sacrifice, “because it is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present and through which he unites us to his one offering of himself” (*ibid*).

Since, as St Paul notes, “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (*1 Cor 11:26*), we should always prepare our hearts carefully before receiving the Holy

Communion. Therefore, we should first examine our lives, repent of our sins, and be in love and charity with all people, lest we profane this most holy sacrament.

## What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is the sacramental strengthening of the baptismal vows and graces for adult life and service upon making a mature commitment to the Christian faith.

The seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit are poured out upon the baptized—the gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, courage, piety, and the fear of the Lord. At times, other signs of Christian maturity may accompany the sacrament, as when St Paul once laid hands on some newly baptized believers, “the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (*Acts 19:6*).

The power to administer confirmation belongs to the apostolic ministry, and now to the bishops as the successors to the apostles. In one case, when the deacon Philip had baptized some new believers and was not able to confirm them himself, they sent for the apostles, “Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (*Acts 8:17*).

## What are Holy Orders?

The Church is the family of God, and families need fathers. Just as the Israelites needed earthly fathers in the patriarchs, and the first apostles were chosen to be the twelve patriarchs of a renewed Israel, so the Church needs fathers for its congregational families to guide, support, and nurture its common life. “Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ,” St Paul wrote, “you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” (*1 Cor 4:15*).