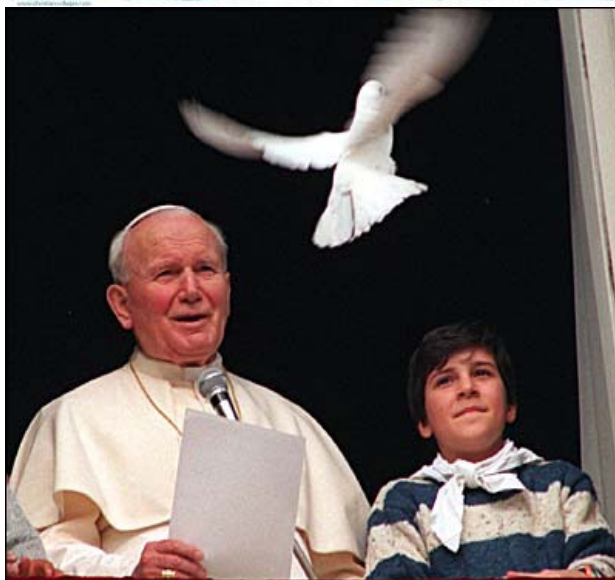
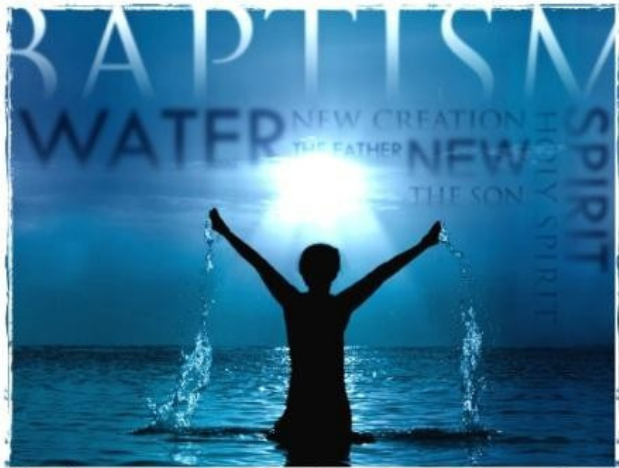


**The Sacraments of Initiation**  
*A Brief Guide to Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist for R.C.I.A.*



By: Fr. Philip-Michael F. Tangorra

## The Seven Sacraments

### **What is a Sacrament?**

As we approach the Season of Easter it is important for us to understand what the Sacraments really are, in general and in particular, so as to appreciate them for the great mysteries that they are and increase our active participation in their celebration. When we attend any of the sacred liturgies and/or a sacrament we are meant to have a full, conscious, active participation. This active participation can be realized in two ways: by serving as a minister in the liturgy or by our spiritual, mental and bodily participation (singing, kneeling, standing, etc...) while attending the liturgy in an engaged fashion. Thus, active participation is primarily an interior reality, a movement of a united heart and mind in praise, honor, glory and worship of the one God that is then enhanced by our expressing what's in our hearts through service, singing, etc. To achieve this it is necessary to understand and appreciate the meaning and mystery of the rituals that are being celebrated. This is achieved through what is called *mystagogical catechesis*.

The catechesis of the mysteries being celebrated begins with first understanding what a sacrament is in the general sense. The word "sacrament" comes from the Latin *sacramentum* meaning "guarantee" or "sign". A sacrament is the visible sign of an invisible reality. Furthermore, it is the guarantee that what it signifies it actually affects. The sacraments are not empty signs, they are in reality what they symbolize. Hence, when we say that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus, we do not mean this simply as a sign, but a guarantee that this *sacramentum* actually is what it symbolizes and does what it symbolizes. Thus, Baptism doesn't merely symbolize our being religiously cleansed, but it does wash us clean of original sin.

In the East, the Church doesn't use the word sacrament. Instead the word "*mysterion*" which is Greek for "mystery" is used. The sacraments are the celebration of mysteries. The central mystery that each sacrament makes real for us is the Incarnation, Passion, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ. The sacraments re-present to us these great mysteries, the mysteries of faith. This re-presentation is not a theatrical production or mere memorial, but is the actual re-presenting, *anamnesis*, sacramentally of these historic events from the life of Christ, so that we may have a real relationship with them and not merely an historical remembrance. When we celebrate the sacramental mysteries we actually re-experience these salvific events. This is why we must have an understanding of the sacramental mysteries, so that we can truly engage ourselves in a full, conscious, active participation. Our hearts and minds should swell with awe and wonderment in the presence of this experience.

Each of the sacraments, and there are seven, were instituted by Jesus Christ Himself. In the sacramental mysteries, we actually experience His ministering to us. The sacraments are the action of Christ brought about by His ordained and lay ministers, the entirety of the Church, who raises her united voice in praise, honor and glory to God. The sacraments are God's gift of His enduring presence amongst us.

## The Institution of the Sacraments by Jesus

Each of the seven Sacraments can be traced to a “sacramental” prefiguration in a ritual from the Hebrew Scriptures as well as a pre-Resurrection institution by Jesus and a post-Resurrection institution by Jesus, which brings both the Hebrew ritual and the pre-Resurrection experience to fulfillment. The central event of the institution of each of the seven sacraments is the Paschal Mystery: the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Every sacrament draws its efficacy and power from the Paschal Mystery. While the Paschal Mystery is the event that each sacrament, in its own way, expresses, through signs and symbols, words and works, each sacrament also has a specific event in the life of Christ Jesus where it is divinely instituted.

Baptism is prefigured in the Hebrew Scriptures in the great flood (See Gn. 7), the crossing of the Red Sea, as well as in the circumcision rite. Furthermore, the Prophet Ezekiel said, “I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you. (Ez. 36: 25-26)” The Baptism of John, the Baptism of Jesus by John and the great commission to baptize the nations at the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost all show the divine institution of this sacrament. Confirmation, which is intimately connected to Baptism, can also be seen in all of these references, furthermore, Amos 6: 6 speaks of the anointing with oil and so does the New Testament fulfillment of Acts 8: 14-17, which is a separate rite from Baptism, but connected to it, and it includes the laying on of hands and the perfection in the Spirit. Jesus promises the Spirit in numerous Gospel passages, such as Luke 12: 12 and John chapters 14-15.

The Eucharist is prefigured in the Hebrew Scriptures in the Manna (See Gn. 14: 18), and the ratification of a new covenant in Exodus 24: 1-11 as well as the *todá* psalms which give thanksgiving for deliverance. Furthermore, the *beruchah* or Jewish Passover blessing and the *zikkaron* all are Eucharistic prefigurations. The multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the Wedding at Cana, the Last Supper and the breaking of the bread in Emmaus as well as amongst the early Apostolic community are those moments where Christ Himself divinely institutes the sacrament of sacraments. Furthermore, there is no priesthood separate from bringing forth a sacrifice, hence these moments are also constitutive for the priesthood, which mediates the fruits of the Paschal sacrifice. The priesthood is also seen in the Hebrew Scriptures in the ordination and priesthood of Aaron (See Ex. 29: 1-30; Lv. Chs. 8-10), the priesthood of Melchizedek (See Gn. 14: 18), and the Levitical priesthood. In the New Testament the entire book of Hebrews, Luke 22: 19, Matthew 10: 1-16 and the numerous accounts of the passing on of the Apostolic ministry to bishops, *episkopoi*, by the laying on of hands, all speak to us of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

The Sacrament of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, which both forgive sins, are tied together. These healing sacraments can be traced to numerous healing miracles worked by Jesus, which healed body and soul. Furthermore, liberating one from their sins is clearly seen in the sacrifice of the temple (See Lv. chs. 4-5), the scapegoat (See Lv. 16: 20-22) and brought to fulfillment in Christ by the story of the prodigal son (Lk. 15: 11-32), the imparting of the keys to the Apostles for the binding and loosing of sin (Mt. 16: 19) and in the imparting of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles for the ministry of forgiving sins in John 20: 22-23. Furthermore, the anointing of the sick and the forgiveness of sins is clearly spoken of in James 5: 14-15.

Marriage is seen in both covenants, instituted by Christ at the Wedding at Cana and is the public witness to the union of Christ and His Church, the bride of Christ (See Ep. 5: 32). Marriage is also poeticized throughout the entirety of the biblical book, *The Song of Songs*. Jesus spoke beautifully about the indissolubility and exclusivity of the Marriage covenant in Matthew 19: 4-6 and Luke 16: 18. All these sacraments express the real presence of Christ in His Church.

### **The Easter Sacraments**

**Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!** The joy of Easter fills our hearts, minds and souls with a great peace and love like a light fills a dark room, scattering the darkness and warming the room with its rays. This joy is so great, that we should never let it go. We should embrace the joy of Easter, the same way we embrace the joy of Christmas, and carry it with us throughout the entire year. Yet, it seems that the joy of Easter, much like that of Christmas, fades as we return to the routine of the daily wear and tare. Yet, this does not have to be. In our frequent reception of the sacraments, most especially of Penance/Reconciliation and the Eucharist, we renew within us the fruits of the cross and resurrection, so as to ever keep burning brightly within us the joy of Easter.

Each of the sacraments bring us the joy of Easter in their own way and in response to our need at that time. In uniting ourselves in thought, word and deed to the Passion of Christ Jesus, dying with Him upon the Cross, we have come to share, through the sacraments, in a foretaste of the new life of Christ Jesus, risen and glorified. When we were children or new converts to the faith it was by our Baptism that we were buried in the watery sepulcher of the earth in order to rise a new creation, dignified and precious. Baptism, though, is not the end. Baptism is ordered unto and completed in true union with Christ Jesus, crucified and risen. This is achieved in the sacrament of sacraments, the Eucharist. “The sacrament of Baptism, by which we were conformed to Christ, incorporated in the Church and made children of God, is the portal to all the sacraments. It makes us part of the one Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 12:13), a priestly people. Still, it is our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice which perfects within us the gifts given to us at Baptism. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 17)” Our Baptism and Confirmation is most perfectly fulfilled when we come to share in the risen and glorified body of Christ Jesus in the Eucharist. It is in reception of the Eucharist and its fruits that we receive the goal of the Paschal sacrifice of Christ: the forgiveness of sins and a share in His eternal life. Living our Baptism calls us to refresh within ourselves the fruits of the Paschal Mystery by our frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, so as to never lose the joy of Easter.

It is also through our Sunday worship that we celebrate the reality of Easter throughout the year. Each Sunday is a “little Easter”. In our Baptism we receive the character of Sunday worship, we have imprinted upon our souls the joy of Easter. It is as a new creation, sharing in the resurrection of Jesus, that we worship Christ on all Sundays throughout the year. Sunday’s then are unique days for Christians to worship God. “Indeed, it is defined by something more than the simple suspension of one's ordinary activities, a sort of parenthesis in one's usual daily rhythm. Christians have always experienced this day as the first day of the week, since it commemorates the radical newness brought by Christ. Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have. ‘Living in accordance with the Lord's Day’ means living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our

lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through a profoundly renewed existence. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 72)”

All of the seven Sacraments speak to our hearts and communicate the joy of the risen Lord Jesus in our lives. The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, though, are those specific sacraments that initiate us into the life of the Church by bestowing upon us the power of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, His death and resurrection, to make us Christians, the followers of Jesus.

### **The Character of Baptism**

After the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and the great joy of the Resurrection, they went out and proclaimed the good news to all who would hear. Those who heard believed and believing they were baptized. Baptism is the sacrament that incorporates one into the Church and infuses the gift of faith in one's soul.

The gift of faith is what begins our spiritual journey and it finds its consummation in love, specifically the sacrament of love: the Eucharist. At the Easter Vigil the Church welcomes those who have been preparing to enter into the Church through Baptism. This ritual is always a moment of great joy and emotion for all who are present. It is at one's Baptism that they are cleansed of their sins, both original and actual, as well as being healed from their past faults. Liberated from sin and any past negative history they are now free to be re-created in the image and likeness of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is in God's image that we are now re-created and it is with that image and likeness stamped on our hearts and souls that we can now call God, our Father! For, truly, we are now God's adopted son or daughter. One with God and united with all our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the Church family.

The Sacrament of Baptism also deutes us to right worship. Worship is the highest act of humanity. It is in praise, honor, glory and worship that humanity acts in its highest capacity. When we are worshipping God we are exercising our greatest intellectual and spiritual capacities. Raising them to inexpressible heights and fulfilling the dignity each of us have received at our Baptism. The Sacrament of Baptism deutes us to right worship because it leaves an indelible mark/character on our souls. This sacramental character conforms us to the priesthood of Christ Jesus and gives us the power to exercise a Baptismal priesthood for the offering of ourselves in union with His sacrifice upon the Cross, so as to receive the fruits of the Resurrection for ourselves and those for whom we offer it for. Being baptized means that we now have a responsibility to offer ourselves in service of Christ and His Church and to pray, because our prayers are intercessions for others are offered to and heard by God.

This sacramental character received at Baptism also conforms us in a special way to the Resurrection, what is called a *Dominicus* character, the Sunday character. Every Sunday of the year we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. Our Baptism is a re-birth in the Resurrection of Christ Jesus. Hence, the *Dominicus* character of Baptism, which is exercised most perfectly by our participation in Sunday worship at Mass, as Baptism is fulfilled in our Eucharistic communion, means that we are a pilgrim people, a new creation by the power of the Resurrection, on a journey toward our perfect communion with the Lord at the Second Coming.

## **Confirmation: The Capstone of Baptism**

“By the sacrament of Confirmation they [the Baptized] are more perfectly bound (*perfectius vinculantur*) to the Church and are endowed with the special strength of the Holy Spirit. (Vat. II, *Lumen Gentium* 11)” The Sacrament of Confirmation builds upon the foundational gifts and graces of Baptism and chains the recipient of this sacrament to the Church in order to serve and defend the Church. As Baptism incorporates one into the Church and places upon them a sacramental character for the sake of sharing in the common priesthood of Christ Jesus and to offer right worship to God, Confirmation augments this sacramental character so that the recipient may all the more share in the common priesthood of Christ in order to be collaborators with the bishop and his priests to teach, govern and sanctify.

The sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord are meant to aid one in their own spiritual growth as well as be used for the benefit of others by building-up the kingdom of God on earth through the promotion of the Catholic faith. Confirmation is the capstone upon the Easter sacraments, just as Pentecost is the capstone upon the imparting of the New Law in Christ Jesus begun on Easter. In the further and more perfect reception of the Holy Spirit and His sevenfold gifts at Confirmation, the Baptized is made a warrior of Christ, a knight of the Church, an evangelist. Made firm in the faith through their instruction and nourished by the sacramental life of the Church, the confirmed is meant to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit received to promote and defend the teachings of the Church. “By virtue of baptism and confirmation, lay members of the Christian faithful are witnesses of the gospel message by word and example of a Christian life; they can also be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters [priests] in the exercise of the ministry of the word. (CIC, 759)”

“It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist...The gifts of the Spirit are given for the building up of Christ's Body (*1 Cor* 12) and for ever greater witness to the Gospel in the world. The Holy Eucharist, then, brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the centre and goal of all sacramental life. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 17)” While confirmation is not necessary for the reception of the Eucharist, once one is a confirmed Christian our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice at Mass ought to be all the more bountiful. Thus, we should offer ourselves more completely with the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross in order to increase our share in the fruits of the Resurrection and Pentecost now aided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

As a pilgrim people looking East, toward the event of the Resurrection and awaiting the Second Coming, we are guided by the Holy Spirit. Our Confirmation increases within us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be more perfectly nourished by it and serve it. We are meant to be stronger pilgrims on our spiritual journey. Sent by the joy of the Resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which is the event we re-experience at Confirmation, we are meant to grow in holiness and help others to do so as we journey toward the Second Coming, the *Parousia*.



## **The Eucharist: Ιχθύς**

Ιχθύς, the Greek for fish is an acronym for Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ (Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior). The early Christians saw in the Greek word for fish this acronym for the profession of faith (Creed). The fish, as it appears in early Christian artwork and in the sacred Scriptures, is never meant to merely represent a fish, but the fish, whether in Scripture or sacred Art, symbolizes Jesus.

At the Roman catacombs of San Maritana in the Most Blessed Sacrament chapel there is a scene of a Baptism and a fisherman. At this time Baptism was done by full-body immersion. When coming out of the water it was like a re-birth, coming out of the womb of the Church. Baptized into the death of Christ, symbolized by the immersion or pouring of water, and rising into Christ's Resurrection, by coming out of the water. The connection between Baptism and the Eucharist is that Baptism is completed in and ordered unto Eucharistic communion. Hence, Baptismal imagery in the Blessed Sacrament chapel is fitting. But, the image of a fisherman seems out of place. A fisherman in the scene of a Baptism signifies that Christians become a part of Christ, who is depicted as the fish (Ιχθύς), through their reception of the Eucharist.



In the Crypt of Lucina, we find the fish with what looks like a basket of bread. Yet, if we look closer it may not be a basket, but a goblet filled with red wine, with bread atop. The meaning is symbolic. The fish is identified with the bread and the wine. Christ is the fish and the fish is being identified with the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. This is a Eucharistic fish.

When we look closely at the Gospel of the “Loaves and Fishes”, it is about the abundance of salvation that Jesus offers us in the eucharistic sacrifice. The words, “took” and “gave thanks”, in Greek εὐχαριστώ (Eucharisto), appear showing us that the breaking, blessing and thanks given over the loaves of bread in this Gospel narrative are St. John's attempt to inspire eucharistic imagery in the minds of the early Christians. The point of this Gospel is to convey the abundant salvation of Jesus Christ, made present to us in the Eucharist, through the ministry of the Apostles, and their successors, at Mass. The twelve baskets filled to overflowing recall the twelve tribes of Israel and how the new tribes, those of the Apostles, shall receive the true manna, the bread of life, and be filled by God's abundance. In Semitic numerology the name Jesus signifies perfect abundance of salvation. The eucharistic fish, the Son of God and Savior, received for our salvation.

The image of the fish in early Christianity and the sacred Scriptures is about the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. Our participating in the holy sacrifice of the Mass is the greatest miracle that we will ever experience. It is a mysterious event that raises our mortal experience to the transcendent realm of the divine.

## **The Sacraments and the Restoration of All Things in Christ**

The sacrifice of Christ Jesus upon the Cross and His resurrection are for the forgiveness of sins and the sake of our capacity to share in His eternal life; the victory over sin, death and the

devil. In contemporary thought, sin is a topic that is largely misunderstood and/or disregarded. And, for this reason, the cross and resurrection, indeed the salvific mission of Jesus, may seem foreign and extraneous, rather than the most intimate and profound act of love that we are meant to relate to. For this reason, we need to take a deeper look at what exactly Jesus has done for us in the Paschal Mystery.

The Paschal Mystery, the crucifixion and resurrection, overcome sin, but sin is not merely a reality that is personal, it is communal and effects all of time and space. There are three types of sin: grave, which may or may not be mortal depending upon certain moral criteria, venial, those acts or inactions that while not grave are still disordered and fail to witness to virtue, and original sin, that ancient sin which has caused all of creation, all of time and space, to suffer a lack of harmonious relationship with its Creator. Hence, there are disorders, strife, and flaws throughout nature, most especially the presence of death.

Jesus comes to walk with us and, through the cross and resurrection, He restores all of creation to unity with His Father, Himself and the Holy Spirit. “For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven. (Colossians 1: 20)” Jesus has come to return, through the sacrifice of the cross, all of creation to the glory of God. The cross and the resurrection are the medicine that heals all *male*, evil, spiritual evil, physical evil and cosmic evil. Through the power of the cross and resurrection every human being, animal and even inanimate creature throughout the cosmos is capable, each in its own way, to return to unity with its Creator.

While not all of us may be culpable for grave sin, we all are culpable for venial sins and experience or know people who experience the evil of illness, physical and psychological handicaps, social and national disharmony that divides humanity against itself, and ecological disorders and wounds that express the fallen harmony of the natural world. Jesus comes with the power of the cross and resurrection to redeem all of creation, most especially humanity, and raise it to a glory even greater than it had at the foundation of the world. As baptized and confirmed Christians, given the sacramental character of the cross and resurrection, our prayers and proclamation of the Word of God, as well as penances and suffrages, can be offered, most especially during the Eucharistic sacrifice of the cross and resurrection at Mass, for the restoration of all things in Christ. Furthermore, the ministry of priests to sanctify all of creation through sacraments and sacramentals, such as blessings, re-orient creation back to its Creator through the power of the cross and resurrection. It is our faith and firm hope that at the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead and the union of Heaven and Earth, shall see the end of all evil, in all of its forms, and all will be perfected unto the glory of God through Christ.

The Sacraments are the means that we have in this life to bring purification, illumination and unity to the world. Our own purification in the waters of Baptism, illumination with the fire of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation and union effected by our receiving the Eucharist, the real and true presence of Jesus Christ, gives us the power to affect the same positive developments throughout the world.



