A Sacramental World

Mass Plus Series on Sacraments 1 St. Veronica Church E. Besl

1. Encounter with God
   • Sacraments are an **encounter with God**. A way **God relates to us, interacts** with us.
   • First consider generally: How does God interact with people?
     o **Through** people, events, places, nature, objects, art, music, relationships, etc.
     o Mediated, indirectly, through human experience
     o God is transcendent, infinite, far beyond limited, finite humans
     o People are not capable of relating to God directly, so God comes to us in ways we can receive
     o God relates to us in a human way, mediated, through things we experience with our senses

2. The Sacramental Principle
   • God can potentially use anything in this world to be present to us
   • God’s invisible presence is encountered **through** visible signs, signs perceptible to the senses
   • Ancient description of a sacrament: a **visible sign of an invisible reality**
   • World is sacramental: God’s presence permeates the world

3. A Sacramental World
   • “**This world** is ... where the incarnate God is experienced.”
   • “God is both revealed and yet also remains hidden in **this world** ....”
     - “The liturgy ... draws on our experience of God in all of life.”
   • The purpose of liturgy and official sacraments is “not so much that we escape from this world but rather **deepen our experience of God in this world.**”
   • “What we do in liturgy **derives from the world and everyday life.**”
   • “**We live in a sacramental world** and it is through the liturgy's use of the things of this world that we experience particularly ‘strong moments’ of God’s self-disclosure. The strength of the liturgy ... is that it draws on our experience of God in all of life.”
   • “Sacramentality comes first; rituals of liturgy and sacraments derive from it. Then they return **us to this graced world.** The celebrations of liturgy and sacraments are integral to and integrating of the Christian life lived in a sacramental world.”
   • “All reality is potentially or in fact the **bearer of God's presence** and the **instrument of God's saving activity**.... This principle is rooted in the nature of a sacrament as such, that is, a **visible sign of the invisible presence and activity of God.**”

   *Kevin W. Irwin, “A Sacramental World: Sacramentality as the Primary Language for Sacraments.” Worship 76 (May 2002), 197-211, emphasis added*

4. Continuity between Liturgy and Life
   • in both daily life and in sacraments, God encounters us in an indirect, mediated way
   • **through** visible signs (such as water, bread & wine, oil; also people, music, gesture, words, actions)
5. A visible sign of an invisible reality

- Sacraments have both: what you see + deeper reality
- Visible sign “signifies” something more
- Invisible is recognized only through the visible sign
- Signify what they cause, and cause what they signify

6. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

- “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct.

  “They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called ‘sacraments of faith.’

  “They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.”  
  CSL 59

- “Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event in their lives.

  “They are given access to the stream of divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the passion, death, the resurrection of Christ, the font from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power.

  “There is hardly any proper use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of people and the praise of God.”  
  CSL 61

- “With the passage of time, however, there have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals certain features which have rendered their nature and purpose far from clear to the people of today; hence some changes have become necessary to adapt them to the needs of our own times. For this reason the sacred Council decrees ... their revision.”  
  CSL 62

“... an important insight of the Christian sacramental principle: that the power of God, like magic in Harry Potter, is not somewhere else or ‘a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,’ but rather right here, right now, all around us.”