**Why Do we Need Sacraments: Part II-Looking at the Gift of the Sacraments**

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| Terms | Definition | Biblical basis |
| Sacrament ( Three things that make up a Sacrament: Form, Matter, Minister) | An external sign instituted by Christ that gives the grace it signifies | God speaks through a person who uses matter to achieve His will/purpose |
| Matter | “External sign”-the physical sign or material of the Sacrament | Gen. 1:31-God looked at all that He had made and found it very God  Jn. 1:14-The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us |
| Minister | The person who administers or has the authority to perform the Sacrament | Jesus is the name above all names” (Phil 2:9); and shares His authority with mankind (Lk. 9:1) |
| Form | The necessary ritual words for the Sacrament to take place | So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Is. 55:11) |
| Efficacious | It always accomplishes what it was meant to accomplish. We call this being | See Is. 55:11 |
| Ex Opera Operato | “By the work done” not based on the holiness of the person doing the work | Is. 55:11 and Rom. 3:23 |

Picking up where we left off last time, we can review our terms and continue to build. Since we now understand the Biblical basis for the Sacraments, we can now explore why they are essential for our lives. There are many reasons, but we will look at four of them:

1. The Immanuel Principle (They let us know that “God is with us”)
2. It fulfills the blueprint of the Sacraments which is found in Marriage and completed in the Incarnation
3. Fulfillment of God’s oath/vow to be our Father who helps his children along the way on a journey to return home (to heaven)
4. The Continuation of God’s saving/redemptive actions

We will see that each of these ways helps us to see the great beauty of the Sacraments and why they are indispensable.

**1st View: The Immanuel Principle**

The first way of looking at the Sacraments is through the Immanuel Principle. Matthew’s Gospel tells us that Immanuel means “God is with us” (Matt. 1:23). The Sacraments show us this very fact; that God is with us at every stage of our lives. Scripture looks at our nature and reflects, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, wonderful are your works” (Ps. 139:14). Since God made us so wonderfully, He doesn’t want to deny or destroy our nature, but build upon it. Could you imagine making a beautiful masterpiece which you put yourself into and then wanting to destroy it or making a child and then wanting to kill it? This is what many people think of when it comes to God and his greatest masterpiece and children…mankind. As St. Ireaneus said, “Man Fully Alive is the Glory of God.”*[[1]](#footnote-1)* Therefore, Jesus instituted a Sacrament for each stage of life.

1. Baptism=Birth-Jn. 3:3-5
2. Eucharist=food that keeps you going -note Jn. 6:51
3. Confirmation: being brought to maturity and strength; into Adulthood-Lk. 24:49
4. Penance: Medicine when you’re sick that gets you healthy/Cleanliness- Ps. 40:5 in RSV; Ps. 41:5 in NAB
5. Matrimony: Union with another for children and companionship-Gen. 1:28
6. Holy Orders: Government to run society-Mt. 16:16-18; Lk. 10:16; they offer sacrifice for the entire community(Heb. 7:27)
7. Extreme Unction: Preparation for death-James 5:15ff[[2]](#footnote-2)

Therefore, in the Sacraments we see that God is truly Immanuel and with us in life, at every stage, even at the hour of our death. Why does He walk beside us, hand-in-hand throughout life? It is because He loves us.

**2nd Way: Blueprint of Marriage/Incarnational Principle**

This brings us to the second way we can see the importance of the Sacraments. We just noted God loves us and lets us know we never have to walk alone. What do you call it when two people (remember God is not only a person, but 3 Divine Persons) want to be with one another for the rest of their lives? Marriage. Therefore, Marriage is the primordial and prototype of all the Sacraments. That means:

* Primordial-It is the first sacrament or visible sign of grace or revelation of God
* Prototype-it is the sacrament that all the other Sacraments or modeled after

Where does marriage first appear? It is in Gen. 1 and 2 with Adam and Eve. God commands them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). Scripture describes it as “a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body” (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:5; Eph. 5:31). Adam and Eve would be the first sign of a new marriage between Christ and the Church (see Eph. 5:31). Christ would unite God who is pure Spirit to the human nature of man through “the Word [becoming] flesh and dwelling among us” (Jn. 1:14). So the two become one body. In Jesus’ Life:

* Christ would “leave” his Heavenly Father (Jn. 3:16-17; Phil. 2:5-7) although note He did not stop being God in the Incarnation
* He left His earthly Mother at the crucifixion(Jn. 19. 26-27) to become one with his bride the Church

So this man leaves His father and mother. By Jesus becoming man and rising from the dead, our human nature’s and even our death incorporate us into His Divine life, thus we become part of His Mystical Body. The two become one body. As a whole, we make up the one whom He laid down his life for. We are His beloved and thus His bride (Eph. 5:25-27). So the external sign of God’s love continues through Christ and His bride/Mystical Body the Church and so the Church becomes the universal sacrament of Jesus Christ, the sign that God and the entire Trinity dwell within us. In the Sacraments, the Church and Christ become one because of their wedding vows. We see this in two ways:

1. In every Sacrament, Christ speaks to us, His bride as first person:

o I absolve you in Confession, I baptize you, This is my body given up for you

o Then we respond in the first person, “Amen”, so be it, I do.

o Through this exchange (which is why the form of Sacraments are so important), we become one with God for the first time (as in Baptism) or again with the other Sacraments.

1. Each Sacrament renews the wedding vows:
   * Will you love and honor each other in Sickness and in health- Extreme Unction. You’re sick, let me take care of you
   * Good times and bad-Confession. You want to fight with me, but I love you anyway. We should make up.
   * I will love you always, as long as you both shall live-Eucharist. “This is my body given up for you”
   * Each time we receive a Sacrament, it is Jesus personally saying to us: I, (*Name*), take you, (*Name*), to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

Each Sacrament is where the two (us and Christ) become one and say to one another, I love you! Love is essential for life which is why we cannot toss them aside.

**3rd Way: God is A Father Who Keeps His Promises**

This brings us to the third way to look at the Sacraments. If the Sacraments are about God’s love; in order for that love to be transforming, it must be given in truth. We all know people who don’t keep their word and how we learn not to trust them. Well God is not a God who doesn’t come through, He is a Father who keeps His promises. This is the third way to look at the Sacraments-the fulfillment of God’s oath. What was God’s oath? To find out we have to go back to the beginning in Genesis, specifically the 7th day. This 7th day is important because seven is “Sheba” in Hebrew which also means to make an oath or to seven oneself (see Gen.21:27-34). It was also on the 7th day of creation that God would bless mankind and allow them to rest in Him (Gen. 2:1-4). So God swears an oath to mankind that He would be one with man, watch over, and love him no matter what. **Is. 62:5 sums up this oath:**

As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.

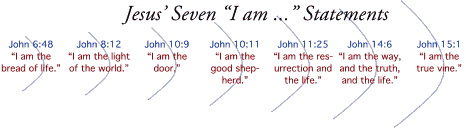
God gave an external sign of this oath to man by giving him all of creation. Then He asked man in return to remain in this love by an external sign; being obedient. Jesus summed it up nicely by saying, “If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love” (Jn. 15:10).

Well, Adam and Eve sinned by eating from the forbidden fruit and by doing so separated themselves from God’s truth and love. Thus, God banished them from the garden so they could physically experience what they had done spiritually through an external sign (a sacramental punishment). God continued to give physical signs that He would love mankind even when they did not love Him back. Some of these signs would be: the rainbow to Noah (Gen. 9:11-16), circumcision with Abraham (Gen. 17), the 10 Commandments with Moses (Ex. 19-20), and an everlasting Kingdom with David 2Sam. 7). God would remind man of His oath and love through things of “Sheba” (both oath and sevens).

This reminder would be fulfilled in Christ. In Matthew’s Gospel we see this in Jesus’ genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17). In the genealogy, there are 3 sets of 14 or 6 sets of 7 showing Jesus would be the fulfillment of God’s oath or seven. Jesus also gives 7 petitions in the Our Father when teaching us how to pray (see Matt. 6:9-15). The Gospel of John also picks us this “sevening” for keeping an oath. We start with the prologue, “In the beginning” and go until the end of the Wedding Feast at Cana and see there are 7 days just like in Creation(see Jn. 1:1, 29, 35, 43; 2:1) to show in Christ there is a new creation, a new sign of his love. John also gives us seven signs of this love in the book of signs:[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. Wedding feast at Cana (Jn. 2:1)-Jesus is Lord of Nature
2. 2nd sign at Cana, healing of official’s son (Jn. 4:46-54)-Jesus is Lord of life
3. Healing of man with paralysis of 38 years (Jn. 5:1-18)-Jesus is restorer of lost powers
4. Feeding of 5000 (Jn. 6:1-15)-Jesus is our true food
5. Jesus calms the storm and walks on water (Jn. 16-21)-Jesus is our help (note-our help is in the name of the Lord-Ps,)
6. Healing of the Blind man (Jn. 9:1-40)-Christ our light and vision
7. Raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-44)-Jesus is eternal life

Next, Jesus gives a sign that He is God and a Faithful Father/spouse with the 7 “I am” statements as well.



John continues this theme in the book of Revelation:

***“****Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God). He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away." The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true." He said to me, "They are accomplished. I (am) the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water. The victor will inherit these gifts, and I shall be his God, and he will be my son. (Rev. 21:1-7).*

In these verses we see God’s oath is fulfilled. One, we see the former earth and heaven/order (way of life) had passed away so there would be no more sin thus no more pain and suffering (v.1,4). Two, we see Jesus (God the Son) marrying His bride the Church fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy (v. 2). We see this was God’s plan from the very beginning. In the beginning, Genesis (hence the name) starts with marital covenant between God and man and ends with the Apocalypse (which is Greek for “the unveiling”) of the Bride and the Lamb (humanity and God). Three, we see God the Father perpetually provides for His children by giving them gifts, particularly the greatest gift of all, divine adoption (see v. 3 and 7). St. Paul also emphasizes this point:

As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. –Gal. 4:6-7

Four, God, the Holy Spirit will be able to dwell with humanity forever as sin is no more and sin is the only thing that separates us from the love of God (see v. 3 and 7). As Isaiah tells us, “Rather, it is your crimes that separate you from your God, It is your sins that make him hide his face so that he will not hear you” (Is. 59:2). So we see that all three Persons of the Trinity fulfill their covenantal promises to provide us to a way to get to our heavenly Home through the Church.

**4th Way: Continuation of Jesus Christ Redemptive Acts**

This brings us to the final way of looking at the Sacraments which is as an extension and application of Christ’s redemption. As Scripture tells us, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus’ redemption is meant universally for all, but it needs to be applied personally. This is what the Sacraments do. The Sacraments apply Christ’s redemption in two ways: as a remedy against sin as well as a help in virtue since Jesus tells us, “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). As a remedy against sin, the Sacraments correspond in the following way:

1. Baptism- a remedy against the absence of spiritual life
2. Confirmation- against the infirmity of soul found in those of recent birth
3. Eucharist-against the soul’s proneness to sin
4. Penance, against actual sin committed after Baptism
5. Extreme Unction- against the remainders of sins--of those sins, namely, which are not sufficiently removed by Penance, whether through negligence or through ignorance
6. Holy orders- against divisions in the community
7. Matrimony- as a remedy against concupiscence in the individual, and against the decrease in numbers that results from death.

As a help to grow in the image and likeness of God, thus perfection, the Sacraments correspond to the Theological and Cardinal virtues:

1. Baptism- corresponds to Faith and is ordained as a remedy against original sin
2. Extreme Unction- to Hope, being ordained against venial sin
3. The Eucharist- Charity, being ordained against the penal effect which is malice
4. Holy Orders- to prudence, being ordained against ignorance (Magisterium)
5. Penance- to Justice, being ordained against mortal sin
6. Matrimony-to Temperance, being ordained against concupiscence
7. Confirmation- to Fortitude, being ordained against infirmity (disease of sin).[[4]](#footnote-4)

This is the reason the Church is the fundamental Sacrament of Christ and Christ’s redemption is applied to us individually through the Sacraments; Heaven’s blessings are applied to us here on earth. God and man were not meant to be separated just as our lives here on earth will not be separated from our lives in heaven. Peter Kreeft puts it beautifully:

“What we learn here, what we do here, is freely to create in time the baseline of our eternal identities. We shape our souls here, and the dimension of eternity is added to that shape in Heaven. It is as if earthly squares become heavenly cubes; earthly triangles, heavenly pyramids; earthly circles, heavenly spheres. The shape into which we shape ourselves now is the shape of our eternal selves; only the size (that is the dimension) is changed. That is why Heaven is not a distraction from earth…For these two dimensions of our identity, time and eternity, earth and Heaven, are not an either-or but a both-and, like the two natures of Christ.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In Conclusion, we see that the Sacraments are tremendous blessings from God. They are not primarily about what we do for God (we go to Mass, Confession, etc.), but about what God does for us. As Scott Hahn says, “They do not make holiness easy, but they do make it possible!” The Sacraments have real power to transform; a transforming power that scares some of us. Many people say God doesn’t love me; if He did He would prove it. The problem is not a lack of God’s love; it’s that God’s love demands a life-changing response and many of us don’t want to make that change. This is why some could say it’s dangerous to receive the Sacraments, the pledge of God’s love. But it’s much more dangerous not to. We need God’s help to be whole, we need Him to be with us on our earthly journey, and we need His love so that we can be happy. This is why we need the seven Sacrament and this is why it is important to learn about them and frequent them often.

1. 185AD, *Against Heresies* (Lib. 4, 20, 5-7; SC 100, 640-642, 644-648). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Summa Theologiae*, II-I, Q. 65, art. 1. Accessed at: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4065.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Reflections based on: <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/hnorris/ssjg/SSJG.HTM> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Summa Theologiae*, II-I, Q. 65, art. 1. Accessed at: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4065.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kreeft, Peter. *Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Heaven But Never Dreamed of Asking* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)