


How God Distributes His Gifts

THE SEVEN CATHOLIC SACRAMENTS

(CCC 1213-1284)

 **BAPTISM** Because of original sin, we are born without grace in our souls, so there is no way for us to have fellowship with God. Jesus became man to bring us into union with his Father. He said no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is first born of “water and the Spirit” (John 3:5)—this refers to baptism.

Through baptism we are born again, but this time on a spiritual level instead of a physical level. We are washed in the bath of rebirth (Titus 3:5). We are baptized into Christ’s death and therefore share in his Resurrection (Rom. 6:3–7).

Baptism cleanses us of sins and brings the Holy Spirit and his grace into our souls (Acts 2:38, 22:16). And the apostle Peter is perhaps the most blunt of all: “Baptism now saves you” (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is the gateway into the Church.

(CCC 1422-1498)

 **PENANCE**

Sometimes on our journey toward the heavenly promised land we stumble and fall into sin. God is always ready to lift us up and to restore us to grace-filled fellowship with him. He does this through the sacrament of penance (which is also known as confession or reconciliation).

Jesus gave his apostles power and authority to reconcile us to the Father. They received Jesus’ own power to forgive sins when he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20:22–23).

Paul notes that “all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation. . . . So, we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us” (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

Through confession to a priest, God’s minister, we have our sins forgiven, and we receive grace to help us resist future temptations.

(CCC 1322-1419)

 **THE EUCHARIST**

Once we become members of Christ’s family, he does not let us go hungry, but feeds us with his own body and blood through the Eucharist. In the Old Testament, as they prepared for their journey in the wilderness, God commanded his people to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts, so the Angel of Death would pass by their homes. Then they ate the lamb to seal their covenant with God.

This lamb prefigured Jesus. He is the real “Lamb of God,” who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Through Jesus we enter into a New Covenant with God (Luke 22:20), who protects us from eternal death. God’s Old Testament people ate the Passover lamb. Now we must eat the Lamb that is the Eucharist. Jesus said, “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life within you” (John 6:53).

At the Last Supper he took bread and wine and said, “Take and eat. This is my body . . . This is my blood which will be shed for you” (Mark 14:22–24). In this way Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal Catholics consume at each Mass.

The Catholic Church teaches that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross occurred “once for all”; it cannot be repeated (Heb. 9:28). Christ does not “die again” during Mass, but the very same sacrifice that occurred on Calvary is made present on the altar. That’s why the Mass is not “another” sacrifice, but a participation in the same, once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Paul reminds us that the bread and the wine really become, by a miracle of God’s grace, the actual body and blood of Jesus: “Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Cor. 11:27–29).

After the consecration of the bread and wine, no bread or wine remains on the altar. Only Jesus himself, under the appearance of bread and wine, remains.

(CCC 1285-1321)

 **CONFIRMATION**

God strengthens our souls in another way, through the sacrament of confirmation. Even though Jesus’ disciples received grace before his Resurrection, on Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to strengthen them with new graces for the difficult work ahead.

They went out and preached the gospel fearlessly and carried out the mission Christ had given them. Later, they laid hands on others to strengthen them as well (Acts 8:14–17). Through confirmation you too are strengthened to meet the spiritual challenges in your life.

(CCC 1601-1666)

 **MATRIMONY**

Most people are called to the married life. Through the sacrament of matrimony God gives special graces to help married couples with life’s difficulties, especially to help them raise their children as loving followers of Christ.

Marriage involves three parties: the bride, the groom, and God. When two Christians receive the sacrament of matrimony, God is with them, witnessing and blessing their marriage covenant. A sacramental marriage is permanent; only death can break it (Mark 10:1–12, Rom. 7:2–3, 1

Cor. 7:10–11). This holy union is a living symbol of the unbreakable relationship between Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:21–33).

(CCC 1536-1600)

 **HOLY ORDERS**

Others are called to share specially in Christ’s priesthood. In the Old Covenant, even though Israel was a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6), the Lord called certain men to a special priestly ministry (Exod. 19: 22). In the New Covenant, even though Christians are a kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2:9), Jesus calls certain men to a special priestly ministry (Rom. 15:15–16).

This sacrament is called holy orders. Through it priests are ordained and thus empowered to serve the Church (2 Tim. 1:6–7) as pastors, teachers, and spiritual fathers who heal, feed, and strengthen God’s people—most importantly through preaching and the administration of the sacraments.

(CCC 1499-1532)

 **ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

Priests care for us when we are physically ill. They do this through the sacrament known as the anointing of the sick. The Bible instructs us, “Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. . . . Is any one among you sick? He should summon the presbyters [priests] of the Church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven” (Jas. 5:14–15). Anointing of the sick not only helps us endure illness, but it cleanses our souls and helps us prepare to meet God.