

WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?

Intro

I. God is the Source of All Life

II. What is a Sacrament?

I. Intro

A. Opening Questions

1. Humans are physical beings. What are some of our physical needs? What does God give us to satisfy those needs?
 - a) Some of our physical needs are: food, water, shelter, etc.
 - b) God gives us animals, plants, other foods, water, material creation from which to build things, and so forth, to satisfy our physical needs.
2. In addition to our bodies, we also have souls. This means we are both physical AND spiritual beings, with both physical and spiritual needs. What are some of our spiritual needs?
 - a) Spiritual needs include the longing to know why we are here, what is our purpose, and what is the meaning of our lives. We have the need for faith, hope, and love.

B. Everything God creates is good. He never gives us a need without a way to satisfy that need. What does God give us to satisfy our spiritual needs?

1. We are both physical and spiritual beings. We have bodies and souls. Our bodies need food, water, and so forth; our souls need God, love, forgiveness, and fulfillment of the purpose for which we were created—to go to Heaven!
2. In fact, God knows we need spiritual sustenance even **more** than we need food and water. In the Sacraments of the Church, God gives us the free, undeserved gift of His very life—grace, which we need in order to go to Heaven.
 - a) The Church is a sign of God's love and the visible sign of communion between God and humanity.
 - b) The seven Sacraments are signs instituted by Christ to give grace.

II. God is the Source of All Life

A. God is the Creator of All Things, Visible and Invisible

1. God created the world *ex nihilo*, which is Latin for out of nothing. When God created all that is, there was nothing but God Himself, who spoke creation into existence. All of creation, therefore, owes its existence to God.
2. **This doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* reveals important truths about the nature of God, creation, and human beings.**
 - a) God is all-powerful and all-knowing, for nothing exists that did not come from Him.
 - b) Nature is real and not a mirage because it came from a Creator.
 - c) Nature is fundamentally good, and God reveals Himself to us through His creation.

3. God reveals truths that we cannot see through the things we can see—material creation—using signs and symbols.
 - a) The invisible God communicates Himself to us through His visible creation. For example, we know love, an invisible reality, through physical signs and symbols—a hug, a gift, or spoken words.
 - b) Three ways God reveals the invisible through the visible are: the Incarnation, the Church, and the Sacraments.
- B. The Incarnation: The Invisible God Made Visible
1. Out of love for us, the invisible, spiritual God became visible.
 - a) Taking on human flesh, God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ, who was like us in all things but sin. We call this fundamental teaching of our Faith the Incarnation.
 - b) The Incarnation is the full revelation of the invisible God and His love for us. God the Father gradually prepared His people for His revelation through His actions in salvation history.
 2. Salvation History is the story of God’s saving actions in human history.
 - a) God entered into a series of covenants with humanity by which He gradually and in stages, in words and deeds, revealed more of Himself and drew us into a deeper relationship with Him.
 - b) Each new covenant contained a **sign** of God’s promise, His love present at the heart of each covenant.
 - (1) Covenant with Adam: Marriage between a man and a woman
 - (2) Covenant with Noah: The rainbow
 - (3) Covenant with Abraham: Circumcision
 - (4) Covenant with Moses: The law
 - c) Finally, at the appointed time, God Himself entered into human history by sending His only, beloved Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, to become human—like us in all things but sin.
 3. Jesus fully revealed the Father and communicated His grace to us in and through His life and teaching.
 - a) Jesus performed miracles as signs of God’s love and mercy.
 - b) He died on the cross out of love for us to pay the debt of sin
 - c) Through His Resurrection we are given new life.
 4. Jesus continues to communicate His grace through the Church.
- C. The Church: The Visible Sign of the Heavenly Kingdom
1. Christ founded the Church during His earthly life.
 - a) Jesus appointed the twelve Apostles as His first bishops, with Saint Peter as their head. The current bishops continue the mission of the first Apostles to preach the Gospel to all men.
 - b) The Church here on Earth continues His mission of saving all souls.
 2. The Church is a visible sign of the invisible Kingdom of God
 - a) The Church uses visible signs and symbols to make known the invisible truths of our salvation. She continues in the tradition of our spiritual

ancestors by recognizing certain signs and symbols as having the power to communicate God's love to us.

- b) As advanced as we might be in our modern world, little has changed in respect to basic human experiences. We all are born to a mother and father. We all experience love and joy, sadness and fear. We all make mistakes and lose our way sometimes. We all experience sickness, suffering, and death. Our lives are remarkably similar to those who lived thousands of years ago. And like our predecessors, we too mark the important moments of our lives with signs, symbols, rituals, and traditions. This is how we work. This is how God made us.
- c) Made up of both body and soul, human beings need the material world in order to grasp spiritual realities. **God in his wisdom gave us material signs as vehicles of His grace.**

III. What is a Sacrament?

A. The Seven Sacraments: Visible Signs of God's Grace

1. Jesus instituted seven signs, or Sacraments, and entrusted them to the Church
 - a) They are: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Holy Matrimony.
2. The seven Sacraments are efficacious, which means they bring about what they signify.
 - a) What makes these seven Sacraments special, and different from every other sign in the world, is that they not only symbolize God's grace, they actually confer it on us.
 - b) Normally, signs only point to things, they do not cause them. For example, smoke is a sign of fire, but does not cause the fire.
 - c) **But the Sacraments actually cause what they symbolize.**
 - (1) For example, the water used in baptism is a symbol of washing and rebirth, and Baptism actually causes that washing and rebirth because through the Sacrament we are cleansed of all sin and reborn as children of God.
3. Grace is the free and undeserved gift of God's life in us.
 - a) The Sacraments communicate God's very life to us. This free and undeserved gift of God's life is His grace.
4. God's grace is necessary for us to grow in holiness, avoid sin, and get to Heaven.
 - a) We cannot do these things by ourselves. Therefore, it is necessary for us to receive the Sacraments in order to receive God's Grace.
 - b) The Sacraments fulfill God's actions in the Old Covenant, make present our salvation won on the Cross, and fill us with hope for eternal life with God in Heaven.
 - (1) Just as the blood of the Paschal Lamb on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt was a sign of life, the Sacraments are signs of God's life in us that fill us with His life and make us holy.

(2) The Sacraments fulfill God's action in the Old Covenant, make present our salvation won by Christ on the cross, and fill us with the hope for eternal life with God in Heaven.