



THE SACRAMENTS

STUDY GUIDE

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THE SACRAMENTS

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THE SACRAMENTS

LESSON ONE
INTRODUCTION & BAPTISM



INTRODUCTION & BAPTISM

LESSON ONE OUTLINE

- I. INTRODUCTION
 - A. Sacraments are encounters with Christ
 - B. “Sacraments are the most important things in the world”
 - 1. Privileged ways that Christ continues to be present to his people and share his life with them
 - 2. Pope St. Leo the Great said, “What was visible in our Savior has passed into his mysteries,” the sacraments
 - C. The “fundamental” sacrament is the Church itself, and the seven sacraments are the means by which the Church expresses its life
 - 1. Intimate connection between Christ and his Mystical Body, the Church
 - 2. Prolongation of the Incarnation across space and time in matter and form
 - a. Matter is the physical stuff
 - b. Form is the words spoken
 - D. Grace
 - 1. “Sacraments are visible signs of invisible grace,” according to the Baltimore Catechism
 - 2. “There is a visible Church with rites and sacraments that are channels of invisible grace” (St. John Henry Newman)
 - 3. *Ex opera operato* (“By the work worked”): something real is accomplished simply by the proper enactment of the sacraments. The efficacy does not depend on the priest being without sin.
 - 4. Pope Martin V expressed the principle: “A bad priest who uses the correct matter and form and has the intention of doing what the Church does, truly performs the Eucharist, truly absolves, truly baptizes, truly confers the other sacraments.”
 - 5. God created the sacraments for the Church but is not constrained by them, so grace also comes from other places

LESSON ONE IMAGE

Baptism, Lorenzo Zucchi after Giuseppe Maria Crespi, 1765.

E. Seven sacraments reflect the statement: “Come to Christ and go out on mission”

1. Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist
2. Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick
3. Mission or vocation: Matrimony and Holy Orders
4. Character sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, which impart “a permanent seal” on those who receive them and thus cannot be negated or repeated.

II. BAPTISM

A. Incorporation into Christ

1. Become members of his mystical body, the Church
2. Baptized are configured to Christ and so are in the life of God—“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”—not outside his life, begging
3. Become an adopted son or daughter of God

B. Every baptized person is incorporated into Christ’s roles as priest, prophet, and king

1. Priest: gives God right praise, the highest praise
 - a. Attends Mass
 - b. Prays
 - c. Makes sacrifice
2. Prophet: speaks the divine truth, publicly
3. King: builds up the kingdom of God and orders the world according to the principles of the kingdom

C. Forgives original sin and any prior personal sins



LESSON ONE

INTRODUCTION & BAPTISM

The believer is given his true I in God on the basis of pure grace and the forgiveness of sins; but it comes with all the compelling force of a love which, of its very nature, demands and appropriates everything.¹

—Hans Urs von Balthasar¹



INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENTS

There is a pervasive falsehood in popular wisdom that says people don’t change. People change all the time, and in every way. All created things change. And, in fact, a lot of change is required to keep something the way you want it. As G.K. Chesterton writes, “If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution.”² God is determined not to leave us alone, subject to a barrage of negative change that would overtake us without his grace. This is what sacraments are all about. God changes us for the good, and he aims to keep us that way. He uses ordinary things to transform us: water, oil, bread, and wine. The revolution of holiness depends on these.

The word sacrament comes from the Latin *sacramentum*, which in Greek is *mysterion*. We have likely heard our priests talk about “the sacred mysteries,” but what do they mean? We are not looking to solve crimes as in a Poirot or Father Brown novel, but rather experience the reality of God. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) teaches in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, “Worship gives us a share in heaven’s mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from that divine world into ours.”³

But, because of our sin, the kindly light of heaven can sometimes be imperceptible or painful.



† ORIGIN STORY

Our earliest ancestors in faith, Adam and Eve, had it all. God gave them free rein over everything he had made. Instead of taking care of it all and enjoying God through it all, they misused it. Their original sin is our inheritance, and it seriously complicates our relationship with God, each other, and the things around us. Jesus identifies money and material possessions as particularly common stumbling blocks to pursuing the fullness of life with God in the kingdom of heaven. A rich young man asks him, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (Matt. 19:16). Jesus’ summary of the encounter echoes down to us today: “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23). But because of sin, we sometimes want the wrong things, or we want more than is good for us, or we love money or possessions more than God, who gave them to us. As St. Augustine teaches, “If we wish to enjoy things that are meant to be used, we are impeding our own progress, and sometimes are also deflected from our course.”²⁴

Thankfully, what God can do to created things for our benefit far outweighs our poor choices. Ancient Israel had a holy but imperfect means of communion with God in the Law (Torah). Christians have a perfected form of communion with God in the Church. The Church is not a mere institution, but rather it is the greatest, most heavenly thing on earth, “the universal sacrament of salvation” (CCC 774–776).

The sacraments of the Church are precisely seven in number: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders. But, as Bishop Barron teaches, “God is not constrained by the sacraments.” The seven sacraments are guaranteed means of God’s grace, but they are not the only means of God’s grace. Rather, the whole universe is sacramental. Experiencing the guaranteed grace of the sacraments in the Church opens our eyes to the sacramentality of everything else.

The Psalmist tells us, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (Ps. 8:3–4). The

God that set the stars in motion is the same God that loves us so much that he sent his Son to die and rise again for us. This God gave us not only a perpetual memorial of Jesus’ death and Resurrection in the Holy Eucharist, but six other special channels of experiencing his heavenly glory here and now.

The “gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments,” is Baptism, which we turn to now (CCC 1213).

† BAPTISM

I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

—Matthew 3:11

At the time Jesus began his public ministry, his kinsman John the Baptist was out in the wilderness administering an unusual ritual. The Greek word *baptizo* means to dip or to sink, and John the Baptist offered this plunging below the water to people who wanted to be cleansed of their sins. John the Baptist acknowledged, however, that his ritual had limitations, just as he had limitations. “He must increase, but I must decrease,” he says of Jesus (John 3:30). And so John was astonished when Jesus asked to be dipped under the water like the rest of the masses. “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?” (Matt. 3:14).

I want you to imagine something a little gross for a moment. Think of the dirtiest you’ve ever been in your life. I mean ever. Maybe it was after a long day working construction in the summer heat. Or maybe it was after slipping down a muddy hill in the rain. Then imagine taking a bath. Not a shower. A bath. On the one hand, that bath got the dirt off. On the other hand, you then had to sit in the filthy water. You were no sooner clean than you were dirty again. John the Baptist’s baptism worked a little bit like getting cleaned up in the bathtub. The water did its job of cleaning off the dirt, but the dirt was right there ready to stick back on to you. And Jesus did not have any spiritual dirt to wash off.

But “all the Old Covenant prefigurations find their fulfillment in Christ Jesus” (CCC 1223). The Baptism instituted by Christ would not just wash away sins; it would impart the gift of Christ’s own divine nature. In John’s baptism, you were your old self, only cleaner (for a while).



In Jesus' Baptism, you become a new creature. As Bishop Barron teaches, every baptized person becomes a priest, prophet, and king—marked as Christ's own forever, and equipped in every way to share in Christ's own ministry.

Many people misunderstand Baptism as being only about the bad. Why would a little baby need to have her sins removed? If Baptism in the Church worked the way it did for John in the wilderness, we might be right to object. Instead, Catholics believe that everyone, including babies, are called to receive the sacrament of Baptism precisely because it confers the gift of spiritual transformation. It opens the door to a whole life of grace, giving us what Bishop Barron calls “the privilege to participate in the liturgy,” and especially in the “source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC 1324), the Holy Eucharist. Baptism isn't really about how bad we are; rather, it is all about how good God is. It is for this reason that Jesus' parting words to his disciples are about ensuring that as many people as possible receive this sacrament and begin a new life with Christ in the Church. In his full, resurrected authority, Jesus both commands and promises: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20).

The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St. Paul show us just how seriously the Apostles took Jesus' command and trusted in Jesus' promise. Their enthusiasm for sharing the grace of God and welcoming newcomers into the communion of the Church was infectious, and “from the very day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered holy Baptism” (CCC 1226). In one of the most moving stories of Baptism from the early Church, St. Philip encounters an Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Under the Law of Israel, a eunuch would not have been eligible to participate fully in the life of the Jewish people; but this one strongly desires to belong. St. Philip encounters him reading the prophet Isaiah—preparing himself, in a way, for receiving the sacrament that he does not yet even know about. St. Philip fleshes out the story of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and the Ethiopian man cannot wait to come into relationship with him. We read,

As they were both going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look here is water! What is to

prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. (Acts 8:36–38)

The old eunuch is dead. The new son of God is born.

One more story from Scripture underlines how great and important Baptism is. It also highlights the fact that coming into relationship with Christ in his Church is God's choice for us even more than our choice for him. In Chapter 3 of John's Gospel, we encounter Nicodemus, a highly influential Jew who “came to Jesus by night” (John 3:2). Nicodemus is curious about Jesus but is afraid to be seen satisfying his curiosity. How many of the religiously unaffiliated people in Western society are like Nicodemus? Jesus tells him that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (John 3:3). Other translations of this verse say “born again” (KJV) or “born anew” (RSV). By the end of John's Gospel, Nicodemus has been transformed. He is holding Jesus' dead body and assisting Joseph of Arimathea in getting it ready for burial. In the Church, those reborn by Baptism get to hold Jesus too, only now in the sacrament of his Body and Blood.



WHY WATER?

If you've ever been in the desert, you know how precious water is. It is essential to life in ways that almost nothing else is. In David Lean's epic film *Lawrence of Arabia*, the title character is horrified to witness a tribal chieftain kill a man from another tribe in cold blood solely for drinking from his well. It shocks the conscience that a man would kill another man rather than share a drink with him; but according to the (un-Christian) rules by which these men operate, absolute control of the water supply is the goal.

Our earth and our bodies are both primarily composed of water. And from the very beginning of the story of God and our created world, water is front and center: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1). The great Church Father St. Jerome teaches that “already at that time baptism was being foreshadowed.”⁵ St. Augustine further clarifies the importance of water as the material God was determined to use for our salvation from the very beginning, “on account of the easiness by which it can be worked and moved.”⁶



There is a special character of water depicted in biblical stories that make it the necessary medium for the sacrament of Holy Baptism. You cannot use sand or flour. Coca-Cola or wine will not work either. Likewise, we do not baptize animals or plants. God designed Baptism only for humans, and he specified that only water will do. In the manual of early Church life called *The Didache* (late first century AD), we read:

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then “baptize” in running water, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁷



CLIMB ABOARD

Water is basic to life, but without God, it can also be deadly. Just ask any sailor who has been lost at sea. The Israelites located the seas as the dwelling place of the sea monster Leviathan (Job 3:8, 40:15–41:26; Ps. 74:13–23, 104:26; Isa. 27:1). For this reason, the sacrament of Holy Baptism is foreshadowed in at least three famous stories in the Old Testament: Noah’s Ark (Genesis 6–8; CCC 1219), the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (Exod. 14; CCC 1221), and the crossing of the Jordan River into the promised land (Josh. 3:1–17; CCC 1222). God not only saves us *with* water, but *through* water.

Have you ever looked at a beautiful old church building and wondered why it looked the way it did? There is a good chance it was meant to look something like an upside-down boat, reminding us that the Church is our intended vessel for journeying through the rough seas. In the time of Noah, humanity had descended collectively ever deeper into its inherited original sin, and God called them to repentance. Noah alone heeded God’s warning, and he prepared himself and his family to be saved through the waters of the flood. From the earliest days of Christianity, the Church was considered our Ark, and Holy Baptism the beginning of our journey.

The great story of Moses leading the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt is equally meaningful. After four hundred years as slaves, God delivers his people through the waters of the Red Sea. The lawgiver, Moses, points forward to the fulfiller of the Law, Jesus the Messiah. And the earthly liberation that Israel felt after suffering under the Pharaohs is a foretaste of the eternal spiritual liberation that begins in the soul of each person in the sacrament of Baptism. The great nineteenth-century Anglican preacher Phillips Brooks (the author of the Christmas hymn “O Little Town of Bethlehem”) described how the Exodus story relates to freedom in Christ in a sermon from 1890 called “The Egyptians Dead Upon the Seashore.” Brooks reminds us that in Holy Baptism, the greatest dreams of humanity can come true. As improbable as it may seem sometimes, we can be rid of all that holds us back from fully flourishing lives:

Some morning we go out to meet the old struggle, and it is not there. Some day we listen for the old voice of our old tyrant and the air is still. At last the day does come when the Egyptian, our old master, who has held our life in his hard hand, lies dead upon the seashore, and looking into his cold face we know that our life with him is over and turn our eyes and our feet eastward to a journey in which he shall have no part.⁸

A baptized person is free (Gal. 5:1), and this freedom is lifelong loving service not to any earthly tyrant, but to the Lord of glory.

Finally, we note briefly the significance of the Israelites’ crossing of the Jordan River to enter the promised land after forty years of wandering in the desert (Josh. 3:1–17). Perhaps the most important element of this story for its relevance to Christian Baptism is the person leading the way. It is Joshua, not Moses, who is given the task of completing the generations-long journey with the people of God. And Joshua is “Jeshua,” the same name as our Savior, Jesus.



“HIS NAME WAS EUSTACE CLARENCE SCRUBB...”

In one of C.S. Lewis’ *Narnia* stories, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, we see a vivid depiction of the effects of Holy Baptism. In this book, we meet a particularly officious, friendless boy with the unfortunate name of Eustace Clarence Scrubb, who “almost deserved it.”⁹ He finds himself in the land of Narnia with his older cousins Edmund and Lucy, and he annoys everyone with his grumpiness about the very things that they find magical, even holy. Eustace “read only the wrong books,” and he doesn’t believe in anything.¹⁰



Eventually Eustace gets changed into a sad, lonely dragon. He realizes for the first time that he is powerless to help himself. We're told it was "clear to everyone that Eustace's character had been rather improved by becoming a dragon."¹¹ He scratches and scratches at his scales, but he cannot be made right. Finally Aslan, the Christ figure, comes to free him from his giant green body. The process is painful. The powerful lion rips at Eustace's scales, making him "hurt worse than anything I've ever felt."¹² After everything comes off, Aslan throws the boy into the water. Eustace tells his cousins, "It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone."¹³

The old know-it-all ingrate has become a joyful companion. His transformation has been painful, but worth it beyond his wildest imagination.



BAPTISM: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

The invitation to receiving the sacrament of Baptism is open to all, from the very youngest to the very oldest—from sweet little babies to insufferable brats like Eustace Scrubb. The Church offers a general welcome to a fellowship in which much is demanded, but much more is given. The Church insists that young children who are brought for Baptism be nurtured in the knowledge and love of the Lord as they grow, as even Jesus himself "increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" (Luke 2:52). Also like Jesus, those who are baptized are adopted as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, who is well pleased with us, and who desires our flourishing to everlasting life.

For adults who come to the Church for Baptism, it is the role of the clergy and duly appointed lay leaders to prepare them to receive a new identity, and to begin to live a new life. In an age where people are increasingly unchurched and unfamiliar with the basics of Christianity, catechesis—teaching the faith in preparation for Baptism—is more critical than ever.

The Second Vatican Council knew very well that a process for making new Christians was an urgent concern. The document on liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, included a mandate:

The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time (III.64).

More than two decades later, in 1988, RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) was finally available for use in the United States. Many adults have come to Baptism and life with Christ in the Church by way of RCIA, and the Church and all her clergy and lay catechists need to stand ready to do this important work like never before.

After all, we're talking about a great gift from God: the gift of a solid, eternal identity springing forth from the most basic stuff of life. In conclusion, a word of encouragement from St. Cyril of Jerusalem about what it means to be baptized:

Having been baptized into Christ, and put on Christ, ye have been made conformable to the Son of God; for God having foreordained us unto adoption as sons, made us to be conformed to the body of Christ's glory. Having therefore become partakers of Christ, ye are properly called Christs, and of you God said, Touch not My Christs, or anointed.¹⁴

Let us all give thanks for this first sacrament!

Q. What if someone is baptized outside the Catholic Church, in another Christian tradition?

A. The Church teaches that anyone baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is truly connected to the beating heart of the Church. For this reason, it is not permitted for validly baptized people to submit to Baptism again if they become Catholic. These people are fully incorporated into the Catholic Church through the sacrament of Confirmation.



QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why do we need sacraments? (Acts 17:28; Matt. 5:48, 19:23–26)
How is the Church designed and equipped to give them to us?
(CCC 774, 1084)

2. Is Baptism necessary for salvation? (John 3:5, CCC 1257)

3. What is meant by the “matter and form” of the sacraments? What is the matter and the form of Baptism? What is the source of this matter and form? (John 3:5; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; CCC 1262)

4. What are the Old Testament stories that prefigure the sacrament of Baptism? How do they show the effects of Baptism? (Gen. 6:5–7:23; Exod. 13:17–14:22; Josh. 3:1–17; CCC 1219, 1221–22)



3. Were you baptized as a baby or as an adult? What personal memories or meaning do you attach to receiving this sacrament of initiation?

THE SACRAMENTS

LESSON TWO CONFIRMATION