

CATHOLIC  
**PARENT**  
KNOWHOW

FORMING YOUR CHILD'S FAITH

# The Sacraments

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YOUR QUESTIONS  
**ANSWERED**

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# THE SACRAMENTS

## Encounters with Christ

### Dear Parents,

Do you still remember your First Communion? Do memories of your child's baptism continue to warm your heart? The times you celebrated may remain such "alive" experiences for you because sacraments are powerful and visible encounters with Jesus Christ.

Reflecting on the sacraments together gives you the opportunity to share your experience of God with your child. What a gift for both of you! It is also a good time to gain open yourselves to God's presence.

The more we understand the sacraments, the more we become what we are called to be — Christ's body in the world. This is both a privilege and a responsibility. The sacraments give us the grace to help us do Christ's work. As we celebrate them we become more like God, and better able to live out our vocations as God's daughters and sons.

When a sacrament is celebrated there are visible signs and actions we see, and there are also actions of God that are invisible to us. We humans understand the world through our senses. God gives us physical signs in sacraments to help us understand what is happening spiritually.

Through the rituals used in our celebrations the invisible work of God is made visible to us.

As you share this learning with your child, may you both find peace and joy in God's grace through the sacraments of the Church.

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# Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist are called “Sacraments of Initiation.” While they may be celebrated at different times in a person’s life, they are connected because they are the ways we are welcomed into the life of the Church. In the Roman Catholic Church, baptism is generally celebrated with infants. First Eucharist is often received around age seven or eight. Confirmation is celebrated as early as age seven in some dioceses but usually occurs in high school.

## Putting on Christ: Baptism

Christ died, was buried, and rose from the dead. When we are baptized, we enter into his new life of the Resurrection. So, in the celebration of baptism, we too die to sin, are buried, and are raised as Jesus was. We think of this as “putting on Christ.” Baptism makes each of us a part of God’s family. Because of this, we are called to do Christ’s work by serving one another and sharing the word of God.

### The Signs

The outward signs of baptism include water, oil, a white garment, and light.

### The Rite

The imagery of baptism is rich and wonderful. The person being baptized is either immersed in water or has water poured over his or her head. At this, the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” are said. The new member is then anointed with blessed oil called “chrism.” This sweet-smelling oil symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit. A white garment is placed on the newly baptized. The cloth shows that the person had “put on Christ” and is now a new creation. Nearby stands the Easter candle, which represents Christ. A smaller baptismal candle is lit from it — a sign that the newly baptized has received the light of Christ. It also shows that the person is welcomed in the Church, to participate with all members in being the “light of the world.”

### Family Activity

Light your child’s baptismal candle at dinner and say a special prayer for him or her. If you don’t have your child’s baptismal candle, use a white candle. Have the family renew their baptismal promises at the end of the meal.

### Talking with Your Children

Sit with your child to look at pictures or a video from his or her baptism. Tell the story of what happened that day. Talk about what your thoughts and hopes were that day for your child and what they are now. Invite to your home the priest or deacon who baptized your child, or write him a letter of remembrance and thanks.



## Family Life and the Sacraments of Initiation

Individual families have traditions and celebrations that say something about their identity as a family. The Sacraments of Initiation are our Church family celebrations that do the same thing for us as part of the family of God.

Just as we invest time and energy in our family traditions, such as a special family recipe, a Christmas tradition, a family prayer, or a favorite gathering place, so too we need to invest in our Church family tradition. The Church’s celebrations of initiation can become opportunities to create meaningful memories and to grow together as family.

As the old saying goes, “You are what you eat.” As we are nourished by Christ in the Eucharist, we should grow more like him. Look for ways in which your family might “be Christ” to one another by serving one another in love.



Karen Callaway

## Open Your Child's Heart to Confirmation

The Sacrament of Confirmation is, in a certain sense, a completion of our baptism. Confirmation increases and deepens the grace first received at baptism. It helps us better approach God as our Father. Through it, we make a stronger bond with Jesus. The gifts of the Holy Spirit increase in us, and we become tied to our Church more closely. Through confirmation the Holy Spirit gives us special strength to spread and defend the faith (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1303).

### The Signs

The principal signs used in confirmation are the laying on of hands and the anointing with sacred chrism.

### The Rite

The confirmation liturgy begins with a renewal of baptismal promises. Then the presider (usually a bishop, a successor of the apostles) extends his hands over those about to be confirmed or places his hands on the head of each person. From the time of the apostles, this sign has been used to show the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then the presider anoints the person with chrism, saying, "Be sealed with the Holy Spirit." This spiritual seal marks our total commitment to serve him forever, as well as the promise of divine protection (see CCC, 1296).

## Talking with Your Children

Explain that at confirmation the Holy Spirit gives us very real gifts. They are not wrapped in paper or colorful bags, but they are actual gifts that will help us all our lives. These gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (see Is 11:2). Tell your child that these gifts are like seeds we plant. If they are allowed to grow in our lives, they will produce the "fruits of the Spirit": charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (see CCC, 1832; Gal 5:22-23).

### Family Activity

Write the gifts of the Holy Spirit on pieces of paper. Put the slips in a jar and have each family member draw one. Talk about what that gift means in your family and how you can show it more in your daily lives.

## Eucharist: The Heart of Christ

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is our family meal. It is the sacrament in which Jesus shares himself most completely with us. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples, offering the bread and the cup with the words, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" (Mt 26:26-28). He asked the disciples to do what he did in his memory, and the Church continues to celebrate this meal in the Mass.

### The Signs

Unleavened wheat bread and grape wine are the physical signs of the Eucharist.

### The Rite

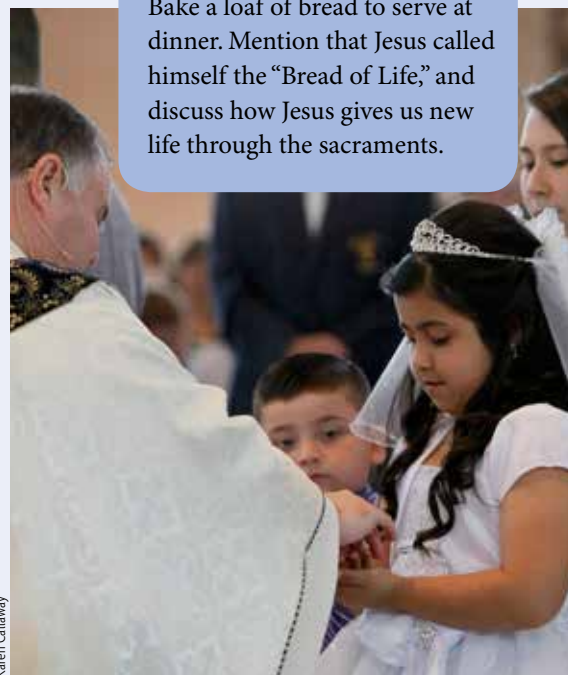
The Mass is the usual time in which we celebrate the Eucharist. We believe that Jesus truly becomes physically present to us under the signs of bread and wine. At the moment of consecration, when the priest repeats the words Christ said at the Last Supper, the bread and wine are changed into Jesus' body and blood.

## Talking with Your Children

Your children probably received this sacrament for the first time in second grade. Now is a good time to review with them — and the rest of the family — our Catholic understanding that the bread and wine truly become Jesus' body and blood. Because the Eucharist is a sacrament that we can receive often, it is necessary to remind ourselves what an incredible gift this closeness to Jesus is to us. St. Paul speaks of the importance of remembering this in 1 Corinthians 11:27.

### Family Activity

Bake a loaf of bread to serve at dinner. Mention that Jesus called himself the "Bread of Life," and discuss how Jesus gives us new life through the sacraments.



Karen Callaway



# Sacraments of Healing

Jesus described himself as a physician who came to heal the sick. Two of the sacraments carry on Christ's ministry of healing. One, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, is mainly concerned with the soul. The other, the anointing of the sick, includes prayers for physical healing as well.



Jim Olvera/OSV photo

## Penance and Reconciliation: Walking Hand in Hand

The Sacrament of Penance, also called “reconciliation” or “confession,” is a reminder and experience of the reality that God loves us no matter what. It is a tangible sign of God’s desire to reach out to us, even when we sin. Through this sacrament God helps us reconcile ourselves with him and with our brothers and sisters. This helps to repair the damage done by sin.

Sin disrupts our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the priest represents both Christ and the Christian community. This connection shows us that through reconciliation our relationship with God and with our faith community is now restored.

### Talking with Your Children

Children instinctively know that we all make unloving choices at times. Do they understand that, despite this, God still wants to be close to us? God will help us in loving him and others. Reconciliation is like a gift that can be opened again and again, for it is always there and always new. The gift this sacrament gives us is twofold: God’s mercy and forgiveness. Talk about what it is like to feel mercy. Recall a time when you could easily forgive your child and how close you felt then. Encourage your children to receive the sacrament frequently, and be a good example by going often yourself.

## Family Life and the Sacraments of Healing

Hold your children to a standard of personal responsibility. Show them unconditional love, but require them to take responsibility when they have hurt others and to make some restitution.

No family is perfect. In every family hurts inevitably occur. But the family is one place in which everyone should always feel loved. Talking honestly and openly about hurts is important, as is a readiness to forgive. Likewise, those who have done the hurting should work to help restore trust and repair the damage that was done. Model a spirit of reconciliation and healing in your family by admitting when you have made mistakes and asking for forgiveness. Going as a family to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation will also set a wonderful example. Children learn quickly that we adults are not perfect, and a willingness to acknowledge it is an excellent example of the humility of Christ.

## The Signs

The signs of penance include our own words and actions and the words and actions of the priest. Our actions in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation consist of contrition, or feeling truly sorry for our sin; confession of our sin to the priest; and satisfaction: doing what we can to repair the damage we have done through sin. The actions of the priest include the extension of hands and the words of absolution. Just as in all sacraments, the visible actions are signs of what God is doing.

God's actions in the sacrament include restoring us to his grace and reconciling us to himself and to the Church.



### Family Activity

Tell your children that when Jesus was being crucified he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Talk about the

times we do things we know are wrong but do them anyway. End by asking forgiveness from each family member for the things we may have done that were hurtful but didn't realize it at the time.

## The Rite

The Rite of Penance may be the one that has changed the most in structure over the past decades. The penitent (the person confessing) most often meets with the priest individually, face to face. Confession behind a privacy screen is still available, however.

The priest welcomes and blesses the penitent and may read from Scripture. The penitent then confesses his or her sins to the priest, and the priest gives the penitent a penance. This is a special action to help repair the damage done by the sins. A penance might be as simple as a prayer or something more involved. The priest then says the words of absolution. The rite ends with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise and a blessing by the priest.



Jim Olvera/OSV photo

## Anointing of the Sick: Make Us Well

Anointing of the sick may be received by anyone who is seriously ill. No longer called "Last Rites," it is not necessary that the individual be at the point of death to receive the sacrament. It can be celebrated multiple times, even for the same illness. Through the anointing of the sick the Church community surrounds those who are ill with support and brings their illness to God. After reconciliation, anointing of the sick is a continuation of Jesus' healing ministry.



Karen Callaway

### The Signs

Holy oil is the primary sign of the sacrament.

### The Rite

When the sacrament is celebrated, the ill are anointed on the forehead and hands with blessed oil. The priest says: "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up" (On the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, Pope Paul VI).

## Talking with Your Children

If a family member or good friend is receiving the anointing of the sick, attend with your children. Help your children understand that through this sacrament God always grants grace and heals the soul, even if the physical illness isn't cured.

### Family Activity

Say a prayer at dinner for all the members of your family who are sick. Remember to include members of your parish family as well.



# Sacraments of Service

Finally, we come to two sacraments we call the “Sacraments at the Service of Holy Communion.” Marriage and holy orders are sacraments of service because they mark a special call by God to build up the Church and to serve others.

## Becoming One: Marriage

In some ways, children may be quite familiar with marriage because they know many people who are married. What's important to stress is that in a Catholic marriage a man and a woman give themselves completely to one another in love. This gift of self is a permanent bond. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, quoting Hebrew Scriptures, says, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one” (Mk 10:7-8).



Marriage is more than just the uniting of two people. Marriage is a sign of the communion that exists with the Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as it is difficult to comprehend how God can be three Persons and yet one God, so in marriage a similar mysterious thing occurs: two people become one.

## The Signs

The vows that are said by the husband and wife are the primary signs of the sacrament, though rings are usually exchanged as well.

## The Rite

In holy matrimony, we see and hear the exchange of vows between the man and the woman and the reception of this consent by the priest or deacon who is assisting with the marriage. This human action is a sign of God's joining of the two persons in marriage.

## Family Life and the Sacraments of Service

When their parents' marriage relationship is strong, children feel more secure and have good role models for working together, solving conflict, and living in community. Make it a priority to spend some time together each week as a couple, away from the children. Couples need this time to reconnect and relate to one another as partners.

## Holy Orders

There are three degrees of the Sacrament of Holy Orders: episcopal ordination (ordination of bishops), the ordination of priests, and the ordination of deacons.

## The Signs

The laying on of hands by the bishop is the visible sign of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

## The Rite

The celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders includes the bishop's laying of hands on those to be ordained. The bishop says a prayer of consecration, asking for God to pour out His Holy Spirit in a special way and grant the gifts the candidates will need to do the work to which they are called. Those ordained as priests are anointed on the hands with chrism.

## Family Activity

Say a prayer for all the priests and seminarians in the Church. If there are any seminarians from your parish or a nearby parish, ask your pastor for their names and addresses and write to them, encouraging them in their vocation.



# SHARE WITH YOUR CHILD

## The Seven Sacraments

Baptism  
Penance (Reconciliation)  
Eucharist  
Confirmation  
Matrimony  
Holy Orders  
Anointing of the Sick

## Thank You for Making Me Your Child

Dear God, Thank you for making me your child. For helping me grow in my body, mind, and soul. Help me to be the person you made me to be, to listen to your words, and to live as your child forever. Amen

## Gifts of the Spirit

Wisdom  
Understanding  
Counsel (Right Judgment)  
Fortitude (Courage)  
Knowledge  
Piety (Reverence)  
Fear of the Lord (Wonder and Awe)

## Act of Contrition

(from the *Rite of Penance*)

My God, I am sorry for my sins  
with all my heart.  
In choosing to do wrong  
and failing to do good,  
I have sinned against you  
whom I should love above all things.  
I firmly intend, with your help,  
to do penance, to sin no more,  
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.  
Our Savior Jesus Christ  
Suffered and died for us.  
In his name, my God, have mercy.

**Fruits of the Spirit:** Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Faithfulness, Modesty,  
Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Generosity, Self-Control, Chastity

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