

ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS

Context

*This resource about the sacraments in **Come and See** is intended as background information for teachers at their own level. It has been written in response to a number of requests which emerged from the evaluation of **Come and See**, which was carried out in December 2014.*

Sacraments

Our everyday life is full of important signs and symbols which express deeper meaning through physical realities. As social beings we need signs and symbols to communicate with others, through language, gestures or actions. The same is true of our relationship with God.¹

We know that God is always with us because we see signs of God's love in the world and in our lives. There are moments when God's love and presence touches our lives in a special way. The Church's seven sacraments celebrate some of these important moments.

In the celebration of a sacrament we meet God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We celebrate with actions, words, signs and symbols. The seven sacraments help us to appreciate who God is, what God is like and what God is doing everywhere and for each person. It is God saying 'I am with you and I love you.'

The sacraments are the life giving power which comes from Christ,

And all in the crowd were trying touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all,

Luke 6:19

The sacraments are the action of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church.² Christ is present in the sacraments, through the power of the Holy Spirit. They help us to live the love of God the Creator which showed itself through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The purpose of the sacraments is to nourish and strengthen the faith of believers and to give worship to God. The words and actions of the sacraments are a teaching tool which integrates and makes holy both creation and human culture and it gives them dignity.³

By interpreting the signs and symbols correctly we can find out what the sacrament is doing for those who receive it. The signs are not just words and actions that have a message for those who are celebrating it; they also confer gift on those who receive it. This gift (which Catholics call 'grace'), is given by God the Father through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. It deepens and develops our relationship with God.

¹ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church CCC 1146

² CCC1116

³ CCC,1149

The Seven Sacraments

The Catholic Church has affirmed that there are seven sacraments. They celebrate special events in the lives of Catholics: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Orders. They touch all stages and important moments of Christian life. They give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian life of faith. There is a certain similarity between the natural stages of life and the spiritual life.⁴

The sacraments may be divided into three kinds:

The sacraments of initiation, *which lay the foundation of Christian life*:

- **Baptism**
Where the person is reborn as a child of God, becomes a member of God's family and a sharer in the mission of the Church
- **Confirmation**
The Christian is strengthened in their life in Christ
- **Eucharist**
The Christian receives the food of eternal life

The sacraments of healing:

Christ who forgave sin and restored healing⁵ has willed that the Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit his work of healing and salvation.

- **Reconciliation**
Enables those who have sinned, that is broken their friendship with God and the community, to be reconciled in God's merciful love, to God and the community.
- **The anointing of the sick**
Through receiving this sacrament the sick are healed in spirit, strengthened, given peace and courage to overcome their difficulties.

The sacraments of service:

The other two sacraments, Holy Orders and Marriage serve to build up the People of God and confer a particular mission in the Church.⁶

- **Marriage**
This sacrament strengthens and perfects the love of the husband and wife.
- **Holy Orders**
Ordination of priests confers a sacred power for the service of the People of God

⁴ CCC 1210

⁵ Mark 2: 1-12

⁶ CCC 1553-1535