

# A RESOURCE FOR PREACHING AND TEACHING ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS



Gregory

*Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis  
September 2015*

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS**

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# LIST OF RESOURCES

## **Scripture**

*New American Bible*, rev. ed. [www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm).

## **Canon Law**

*Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition: New English Translation* (Code). Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998.

*Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: New English Translation* (CCEO). Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 2001.

## **Documents of the Universal Church**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (CCC). Washington, DC: LEV-USCCB, 2000.

*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCCC). Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006.

*Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP (Vat II). Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975.

## **Papal Documents**

Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) [EG], Washington, DC: LEV-USCCB, 2013.

Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (*Misericordiae Vultus*) [MV]. Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, April 2015.

Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter on the Holy Eucharist* (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*), Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, April 2003.

## **Documents from Vatican Offices or Congregations**

Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Decree on the revised Rite of Penance (Rite of Penance)*. December 2, 1973.

Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory*. Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, April 2015.

## **Documents from the USCCB**

*Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist*. Washington, DC: USCCB, November 14, 2006.

*National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC). Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005.

*Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily*. Washington, DC: Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations, of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). 2013.

*The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions and Answers*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2001.

*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, study ed. (RCIA). Washington, DC: USCCB, 1988.

*The Rites of the Catholic Church as revised by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, study ed. Volume One, (Rites). Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990.

*Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT). Washington, DC: Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, USCCB, 2012.

*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA). Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006.

## INTRODUCTION

“Catechesis both precedes the Liturgy and springs from it. It prepares people for a full, conscious, and active participation in the Liturgy by helping them understand its nature, rites, signs, rituals, and symbols expressed in the Liturgy; to discern the implications of their participation in the Liturgy; and to respond to its missionary summons to bear witness and offer service. And Liturgy itself is inherently catechetical.”<sup>1</sup>

“Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ . . . by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries.’” Liturgical catechesis fosters a deeper sense of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments. “In other words, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in sacramental practice.”<sup>2</sup>

In service to this important relationship between catechesis and the Liturgy, the USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis has prepared this resource. It is designed to assist homilists in preparing an evangelizing and catechetically rich homily on all but one of the sacraments. Because the Rite for the Ordination of Priests already has specific homily guidelines for the “Bishop’s Address,” and because no priest or deacon would serve as the homilist for an ordination, no additional resources were provided for this sacrament in this set of resources.

First reception of a sacrament often is an occasion for families of the candidates, plus extended family and friends, to join their relatives at church. Typically among this group, there are active and inactive Catholics, baptized non-Catholics, and non-Christians. While the homilist’s main focus is on those catechumens or candidates receiving the sacrament, it is also important to enrich the faith of active Catholics, to invite those supporting the candidate to consider returning to the Catholic faith if they have drifted away, or to invite non-Catholics to consider the Catholic faith for the first time. This is best done through a heartfelt and loving invitation that clearly explains the faith in language accessible to all present.

Attention is also important for the faithful who celebrate sacraments that may be repeated (e.g. Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick). Preparing for the homily, the homilist may want to consider using one or more of these homily resource ideas to invite the congregation into a deeper relationship with Christ and his Church. Obviously, although it will not be possible or advisable to include all this material in any one homily, it is important for the celebrant to keep in mind the comprehensive nature of the teaching while choosing which points will be important to emphasize at a particular sacramental celebration.<sup>3</sup>

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1 *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, 110.

2 *Idem*, 110-111.

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3 See Pope Francis, EG 145-159.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Here are a few general considerations that might be helpful in preparing the homily.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Prayerful Reflection on the Scriptural Texts for Each Sacrament Is Crucial<sup>5</sup>

Among the general principles which guided the Fathers of Vatican II in the revision of the liturgical books was “an enlarged view of the importance of Sacred Scripture as a source of the liturgy.” The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states that “Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from it that lessons are read and explained in the homily . . . .”<sup>6</sup> Speaking of Baptism, the *Catechism* explains that “The proclamation of the Word of God enlightens the candidates and the assembly with the revealed truth and elicits the response of faith . . . .” In treating the Holy Eucharist, the *Catechism* reminds us that “. . . the homily . . . is an exhortation to accept this Word as what it truly is, the Word of God, and to put it into practice . . . .” As in the case of these two sacraments, so it is also with the other sacraments. The homilist’s prayer and meditation upon the Scripture readings proclaimed is crucial in setting the context for the homily (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 1228, 1236, 1349).

### 2. An Opportunity for Evangelization<sup>7</sup>

Each time that the faithful gather to celebrate a sacrament, the homilist has an excellent opportunity to proclaim the Good News, to invite the

listeners to an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and a commitment to be his witnesses for the building up of his Body in faith and love, and to teach what the Church teaches about that sacramental encounter with Christ.<sup>8</sup> The Bible, the *Catechism* and the *Rites*<sup>9</sup> book are key resources to use in better understanding the words, gestures, signs, and symbols used in celebrating each sacrament.

It is very likely that the congregation will be composed of a diverse group with various religious affiliations or no religious affiliation. For example, there may be many practicing Catholics, but there may be others who have fallen away from the Catholic faith, or who have never been presented with the Gospel. This could be the first time ever, or in a long while, that someone has heard about faith in Christ and why it is life-changing.<sup>10</sup> In celebrating liturgies where individuals receive a sacrament for the first time, there may also be a number of families where one spouse is Catholic while the other is a baptized non-Catholic or a non-Christian. Welcoming them and thanking them for presenting their children for the sacraments, as well as helping them understand the meaning and ritual involved in each sacrament, is both helpful and usually well received.

When a sacrament is celebrated within the context of a Mass, this diversity of religious affiliations presents an important pastoral and catechetical moment calling for a pastoral explanation of the Church’s norms for receiving Holy Communion (which place restrictions for baptized Catholics as well as baptized non-Catholics and non-baptized alike). For a clear explanation, see *Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist*. Washington, DC: USCCB, November 14, 2006.

4 For an in depth look at preaching, please see USCCB Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2013).

5 For a more complete preparation, please review Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory* (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, April 2015).

6 See *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), edited by Austin Flannery, OP (Vat II) (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 24.

7 EG 264-281.

8 EG 160-175.

9 The current edition does not include recently updated Rites: Confirmation and Matrimony.

10 EG 142-144.

Besides its religious diversity, the congregation is subject to the influence of cultural or social challenges<sup>11</sup> that have gradually filtered into minds and hearts, perhaps becoming barriers to a more complete appreciation of the importance and meaning of sacramental life. These challenges can blur a proper understanding and appreciation of the faithful's dependence upon God and his grace.<sup>12</sup> They can subtly undermine one's perceived need for Christ and his Church, especially in regards to maintaining an active sacramental life, including regular reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. They can trivialize the mystery of human suffering, the grace given by the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick for relief from pain and possible restoration to health; and the promise of eternal life. Homilists will be greatly served by knowing their congregation.<sup>13</sup>

An increasing number of young adults are dropping out of active engagement with the Church, identifying themselves as having no religion ("nones"). Should they make an attempt to connect—even for one Mass—they may find it difficult to find their place in a parish which provides services focused primarily on children and families rather than on singles (e.g. singles for a time, widows, divorcees).<sup>14</sup> Young adults will welcome efforts by homilists to speak to their challenges to living the Gospel as a young adult today.

Many young adults have not received Confirmation/Chrismation for a variety of

reasons. To assist them, parishes are providing an annual or biannual Confirmation preparation process for young adults. A personal invitation from the pulpit, and in other ways, helps them to participate in Confirmation/Chrismation preparation sessions designed for them and their busy schedules.

In a homily during the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean at Aparecida, Benedict XVI reminded his audience of bishops that "a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation."<sup>15</sup>

We live in a culture marked by strong relativism and a loss of the sense of sin which leads us to forget the need for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in order to worthily approach receiving the Eucharist. As pastors, we are called to encourage frequent confession. We invite our priests to devote sufficient time to offering the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation with pastoral zeal and merciful hearts, and to prepare worthily the places of celebration, so that they may express the meaning of this sacrament. Likewise, we ask our faithful to appreciate this marvelous gift of God and to approach it in order to renew baptismal grace and to live more authentically the call of Jesus to be his disciples and missionaries. We bishops and priests, ministers of reconciliation, are particularly called to live intimately with the Master. We are conscious of our weakness and of the need to be purified by the grace of the sacrament which is offered to us so that we may identify ever more with Christ, Good Shepherd, and missionary of the Father. As it is our joy to be fully available as ministers of reconciliation, we ourselves must also frequently approach, on

11 For more on challenges, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT). (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012), Introduction and Part 1.

12 EG 176-258

13 EG 137-138, 140-141.

14 For outreach and planning purposes, it may be helpful to gather a cross-section of parishioners to review parish services and to make sure that there is something for everyone. Provide a variety of ways for 'visitors' to connect with their peer groups and get involved in ways suited to their busy schedules. Encourage them to not only be registered in a parish, but also actively engaged—according to their gifts and availability—in the life and mission of the Church.

15 Pope Benedict XVI. V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Concluding Document. Aparecida: Centro de Publicaciones del CELAM, quoting from the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), 20.



our penitential journey, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.”<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these resources for a homily on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, to encourage the faithful to frequent the sacrament, the whole pastoral staff is encouraged to take the following steps in service to neophytes, ongoing conversion of the faithful, and special outreach efforts towards inactive Catholics.

- Pastoral Care for Neophytes: Actively participate in the formation of those preparing for their first Confession; provide opportunities for those newly baptized at the Holy Saturday Vigil to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation thereafter; provide periodic reminders for them to continue to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation after their first confession on a regular basis.
- Ongoing Conversion of the Faithful: Look for ways to provide for continual repentance of the faithful who have already celebrated their first confession through frequent preaching on the need for conversion; through penitential services (see Rites, 592-624); through regular opportunities to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation; in personal and devotional prayer; and in the penitential parts of the Eucharistic celebration.
- Special Outreach Efforts: Through various programs and outreach efforts, seek out and minister to those who may have slipped away from regular participation in the Church, as well as those who stopped practicing their faith because of some actual or perceived injury dealt them at the hands of a minister or member of the Church. At an opportune moment, extend an invitation for them to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

### 3. Invitation to Inactive Catholics

Preaching is a privileged opportunity to invite inactive Catholics to return to active sacramental practice. Homilies for each of the sacraments provide an ideal time to all present to seize the moment to celebrate the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation, Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation/Chrismation.

- *Penance and Reconciliation*: Anyone with the proper disposition can be forgiven by Christ and begin anew on his or her journey of faith, no matter how many years may have passed since Baptism, or how many times he or she may have sinned. If you are a baptized Catholic but no longer practice your faith, we are the lesser for your absence and want to extend a helping hand to assist you with whatever you need to rejoin your Catholic community. You can rest assured that God is waiting like the loving father in the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk15:11-32) to receive you back and to welcome you with open arms. Please do not hesitate to talk to a priest at the end of this service, or later from home.
- *Confirmation/Chrismation*: Are you a baptized Catholic who, for whatever reason, has never been confirmed? Just like Jesus promised that his Father would send the Spirit to the apostles at Pentecost (Jn 14:26), that same Holy Spirit is poured out upon us today in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Why not deepen and enrich your share in God’s grace, in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in the life and mission of the Church? The Church needs you as her ambassador and Christ’s witness to the world. You need the Church to nourish and sustain you for the rigors of discipleship.

16 Pope Benedict XVI. V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Concluding Document. Aparecida: Centro de Publicaciones del CELAM, 177.

· *Holy Eucharist:* Jesus was very clear about the central importance of communion in the Eucharist for anyone who wanted to remain united to him. Jesus taught “I am the bread of life . . . If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.” He also taught that “If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:48-52). If you are a baptized Catholic who received First Holy Communion but now no longer attend Sunday Mass nor receive Holy Communion, you are depriving yourself of the bread of life.

Finally, homilists are well aware that there may be several people in the congregation who have heard the Church’s teaching simply as a “no” and/or have left the Church for some specific reason. The homily is an opportunity to present the great “yes” of the Gospel and to invite all those present to behold the face of Christ, who reveals that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16).

From the love of God the Father, poured out through his Son, and made present through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church continues to make available the fruits of Jesus’ saving life, death and Resurrection in the Seven Sacraments. The life we live as disciples, grounded in the sacraments of the Church, makes God’s love visible and available for us and for all humankind.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For a recent treatment on the sacraments, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SAC-CAT) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012).

# INTRODUCTION TO TREATMENT OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

“Following the example of the early Christian community (cf. Acts 2:46-47), the parish community gathers to break the bread of the Word and of the Eucharist, and to encourage participation in sacramental life, and the practice of charity, through catechesis. It renews its life in Christ in the Eucharistic celebration. For the parish, the Eucharist is a school of Christian life, in which the community of the disciples is strengthened. Together with Eucharistic adoration and the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, its members are prepared so they can produce ongoing fruits of charity, reconciliation, and justice for the life of the world.

- a) The Eucharist, source and culmination of the Christian life, enables our parishes to be Eucharistic communities that sacramentally live the encounter with Christ the Savior. They also celebrate with joy:
- b) In Baptism: the incorporation of a new member into Christ and into his body which is the Church.
- c) In Confirmation: the perfection of the baptismal character and strengthening of ecclesial belonging and of apostolic maturity.
- d) In Penance and Reconciliation: the conversion that we all need to turn away from sin, and to embrace our baptismal commitments.
- e) In the Anointing of the Sick: the evangelical sense of community members who are seriously ill or in danger of death.
- f) In the Sacrament of Holy Orders: the gift of the apostolic ministry which continues to be exercised in the Church for the pastoral care of all the faithful.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Please see page 2, third paragraph, last sentence for explanation of why no treatment was provided for the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

- g) In Matrimony: love of spouses which as God’s grace germinates and grows to maturity making effective in daily life the complete self-giving that they made mutually in marrying.”<sup>19</sup>

## Baptism<sup>20</sup> (USCCA, Chap. 15)

### 1. Witness

*From conception, each human person is loved by God and invited to share in the life of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as adopted sons and daughters. “This awareness of God’s tender mercy, which is sowed in the heart of every Christian from the day of his Baptism, calls for growth, together with the life of grace, to bear much fruit . . . our life as Christians matures because it experiences the mercy of God. Not an abstract idea of mercy, but a concrete experience with which we understand our weakness and the strength that comes from on high. Empowered by that understanding of weakness in which we live, we are better equipped to become compassionate to all.”<sup>21</sup>*

### 2. Evangelical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Elements

- Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are the foundations of Christian life, and together constitute the Sacraments of Initiation (CCC 1285).
- Jesus taught that Baptism was necessary for salvation (see Rom 6:3-4; Jn 3:5; Mk 16:16; Mt 28:19-20; CCC 1277).

<sup>19</sup> V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Concluding Document. Aparecida: Centro de Publicaciones del CELAM, no. 175.

<sup>20</sup> For more information, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> MV 14.

- “Baptism” [Greek, meaning “immersion”/“bath”] suggests a process of cleansing in water, and a dying (entry into the water) and rising to new life (rising from the water) (see Col 2:12).
- The origin and foundation of Christian Baptism is Jesus, who calls for all human beings to die to themselves to do God’s will.
- Jesus commands his disciples to baptize all nations so that they will be reconciled with the Father, freed from sin, and live a new life with God.
- The eight elements of the Baptismal ceremony teach the meaning of this initiation sacrament (CCC 1234): Sign of the Cross, Readings from Scripture, Exorcism and Anointing, Blessing the Baptismal Water, Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith, the Essential Rite of the Sacrament, Anointing with Sacred Chrism, Reception of White Garment and the Candle (USCCA 184-187).
- Ordinary ministers of Baptism are bishops, priests, and (in the Latin Church) deacons.
- In case of necessity, anyone with the right intention may baptize by using water and the Trinitarian baptismal formula (Mt 28:19; CCC 1256).
- Who can receive Baptism: unbaptized adults (RCIA); adults baptized in another Christian church and seeking full communion with the Catholic Church; infants; children of catechetical age; those who die without being baptized (see USCCA, 192-197; Baptism of Blood and Baptism of Desire).
- Through Baptism, the baptized are forgiven of their sins, become adopted children of God, are initiated into the Church, bonded to other Christians, configured to Christ, sealed with an indelible spiritual mark (character), called to holiness, and committed to the Church’s apostolic and missionary activity (CCC 1270).

### 3. *Summary of Teaching and Faith Response*

“Through Baptism, we retain a grace greater than that enjoyed by Adam and Eve” (CCC 420).

We are not simply restored, but by the grace of Christ, we are given the grace of divinization, which surpasses the grace Adam and Eve enjoyed. Gradually we are strengthened and assisted by the gifts (Isaiah 11:1-3, CCC 1830) and fruits (CCC 1832) of the Holy Spirit received at Baptism. We shed behaviors not in keeping with life in Christ. We grow in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (CCC 1803), and practice four pivotal human (cardinal) virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (CCC 1805).

We gradually take on the likeness and work of Jesus Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. We are reminded by Jesus to stay closely united to him, like branches to a vine, lest the life of Christ in us be threatened by sin. United to Christ, we also find ourselves united with the whole Church, which is his Body. We actively reach out to strengthen our union with the Church. Together we share a common life in Jesus’ service. We lift up our lives to God in worship. We deepen our understanding of the Faith and strive to live it daily. We embrace a call to give Gospel witness to the world. Along our journey, we are accompanied by God and empowered by sacramental life, especially through weekly participation in the Mass and regular Confession.

### 4. *Prayer*

Catholics begin and end prayer with the Sign of the Cross, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In one quick gesture, we call to mind that the Father sent Christ to die on the cross for our salvation; that the Spirit readies us to be Jesus’ followers, giving us grace and habits (virtues) that help us to avoid sin and to do good; and finally that we will need that help to bear whatever suffering may come our way for the sake of the Gospel. As a reminder of your Baptism, daily and reverently trace the Sign of the Cross on your body. Say a prayer that you will be ready to give testimony to God’s love and mercy when the opportunity arises.

## Confirmation/Chrismation<sup>22</sup> (USCCA, Chap. 16)

### 1. Witness

“There are those who have said that courage in witnessing our faith is one of the best proofs for the existence of God. Confirmation is the sacrament that makes courageous witness possible. The never-ending stories of martyrs and other Christian heroes and heroines throughout the centuries to the present provide ample evidence of the Holy Spirit’s gift of courage. Today, there are plenty of opportunities to act courageously on behalf of the teachings of Christ and the Church, to promote the stability of marriage, to support the ideals of family life, to be brave in defending human life from conception to death, to be steadfast in seeking justice for the oppressed, and to be determined that the light of Christ’s compassion and peace will shine everywhere on earth.”<sup>23</sup>

### 2. Evangelical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Elements

- Confirmation, (called “Chrismation” in the Eastern Churches), is one of the Seven Sacraments.
- Jesus’ entire mission occurred in communion with the Spirit (he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, promised to send the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the whole Church, and raised from the dead by the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit
- After his Resurrection, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on the Apostles as promised (see Jn 20:22; Acts 2).
- Like Baptism and Holy Orders, Confirmation confers an unrepeatable and indelible

*character* or *seal* (CCC 1317), by which the Christian shares in Christ’s priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. It remains forever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise of divine protection, and a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church (CCC 1121).

- “The imposition of hands is . . . the origin of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church” (CCC 1288).
- The essential rite of Confirmation includes: anointing the forehead of the candidate with Sacred Chrism while saying the words “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit,” or, in the East, anointing the forehead, eyes, nose, ears, lips, chest, back, hands, and feet of the candidate while saying at each anointing “The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1294); preparing the recipient of Confirmation (CCC 1309, 1319); the Essential Rite of Confirmation; the ministers; and the effects of the sacrament.
- Several meanings of anointing with oil include cleansing as part of a bath, limbering of muscles of athletes, and healing of wounds of the sick.
- In the Latin Church, adult catechumens and children of catechetical age are baptized, confirmed, and receive the Eucharist at the same celebration and typically at the Easter vigil (see RCIA, 206-208). When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism within the dioceses of the United States, it is administered between the age of discretion up to about sixteen years of age. Celebration is normally reserved to the bishop, signifying that Confirmation strengthens the ecclesial bond (see CCC 1292).
- In the Eastern Catholic Churches, Chrismation is administered by the priest immediately after Baptism, and some also offer reception of the Holy Eucharist (CCC 1233), thus highlighting the unity of the Sacraments of Initiation, and the apostolic unity of the Church.

22 For more information, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012).

23 USCCA 211.

- The effects of Confirmation increase and deepen baptismal grace by: rooting us more deeply in divine filiation as God’s adopted sons and daughters; uniting us more firmly to Christ; increasing our share of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:1-3; CCC 1830); rendering our bond with the Church more perfect; giving us the special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith as witnesses of Christ, to confess Christ’s name more boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross (CCC 1285, 1303, 1316).

### 3. *Summary of Teaching and Faith Response*

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Messiah and then on the Church, first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly on Pentecost. Very early on, the gift of the Holy Spirit was signified by an anointing with perfumed oil (Chrism/Holy Myron) consecrated by the bishop at the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday, accompanied by the laying on of hands. This anointing highlights the name “Christian,” which means “anointed” and is derived from the name of Christ himself whom God “anointed with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38). In the West, the term “Confirmation” suggests that this sacrament both confirms Baptism and strengthens sacramental grace (CCC 1286-1289). It is common for churches to have a repository to reserve and venerate the Sacred Chrism (Holy Myron), along with the oil of catechumens and the oil of the sick (CCC 1183).

### 4. *Prayer*

After Baptism, we are further prepared in Confirmation to take up our part of the mission of Christ and the Church. We are strengthened by the seal of the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands that marks us for Christ (CCC 1295). We are drawn closer to Christ, and we share more deeply in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable us to bear fruit (charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, humility, fidelity, modesty, continence, chastity [Galatians 5:22-23; CCC

145-146, 390]) and to join our efforts to Christ’s in hastening the coming of God’s kingdom.<sup>24</sup> As we reflect on our Confirmation, we are encouraged to live our faith with passion and zeal. We thank God for the invitation to frequent the sacraments of Confession and Eucharist, to regularly unite our prayers and actions with those of the whole Church, to be more attentive to the actions and guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and to serve the Lord with joy and gladness. Let us sing together the familiar hymn to the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,  
and in our hearts take up thy rest.  
Come with thy grace, and heavenly aid  
to fill the hearts which thou has made.”

## **Eucharist<sup>25</sup> (USCCA, Chap. 17)**

### 1. *Witness*

Two elements that figure largely in the Eucharist are bread and wine. As part of their Jewish roots, they are offered to God in sacrifice during the Jewish feast of First Fruits, and they are consumed as part of the Passover celebration that commemorates the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he gave a new meaning to the Passover blessing of the bread and of the cup. Through Jesus’ words of institution of the Eucharist, the elements of bread and wine now become Jesus’ Body and Blood. Jesus’ passing over to his Father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Last Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom (CCC 1340). The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and the changing of the water into wine at Cana (Mt 14:13-21–15:32-39) prefigure the Eucharist (CCC 1333-1335). Participation in the Mass and reception of Holy

<sup>24</sup> See Mt 10:17.

<sup>25</sup> For more information, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012).

Communion (under the appearance of bread and wine) should make a difference in the believer's life. Here are some signs of that impact: joy; eagerness to do good works, to please God and to live honestly; devotion to the Church; putting into practice what has been learned; growing in piety; witnessing to Christ (Vat II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9. Chap I, I). Do you see any of these signs occurring in your life as a result of your participation in the Eucharist?

## 2. *Evangelical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Elements*

- The Eucharist is the “source and summit of ecclesial life” (CCC 1324).
- The Sacrament has many names (CCC 1328-1332).
- Jesus instituted the Eucharist on the night before he died as a memorial of his death and Resurrection, and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return (Lk 22:7-20; CCC 1337). The Church has been faithful to this command since its earliest days (Acts 2:42, 46).
- The Mass (“Divine Liturgy” in the East) is the principle celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. It is divided into two parts: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist.
- The Mass includes thanksgiving to God the Father; the re-presentation in sacrament of the sacrificial self-offering of the Son; transubstantiation; and participation in the liturgical banquet by receiving the Lord’s Body and Blood (Vat II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9, III A). These elements constitute one single act of worship (CCC 1345-1355, 1408).
- Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and the Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life (CCC 1324-1327). The faithful are obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and on Holy Days of Obligation and to rest from servile labor (CCC 2042; Vat II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9, II A-B, and canon 1247 [Code] or canon 881 [CCEO]).
- Transubstantiation: the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ made present through the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The conversion of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood is Transubstantiation (CCC 1373-1381).
- Christ, acting through the ministry of the priest, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice to God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Only a validly ordained priest can preside at the Eucharistic sacrifice and consecrate the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ (CCC 1410-1411).
- The effects of Eucharist: “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and the work of our redemption is carried out” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 11). The Eucharist is a source of communion with the Trinity (CCC 1391-1392); it forgives venial sins and helps one avoid mortal sin (CCC 1393-1395; see also Vat II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9, III E); it effects and strengthens the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ (CCC 1396-1401); and it commits the faithful to the poor (CCC 1397).
- In the Latin Church, adult catechumens and children of catechetical age also are baptized, confirmed, and receive Eucharist at the same celebration: typically at the Easter vigil (see RCIA 206-208). When first Eucharist is celebrated separately from the other two Sacraments of Initiation, it is normally administered to candidates who have reached the catechetical age. Some Eastern Catholic Churches offer reception of the Holy Eucharist after the priest administers Baptism and Confirmation (CCC 1233), thus highlighting the unity of the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation.
- Other words, gestures, signs, and symbols that are key to the celebration of the Eucharist: Mass is a Sacrifice (USCCA 220-222), the Mass is a Holy Meal (USCCA 222-223), the Real Presence of Christ (USCCA, 223-224), the Church as the People of God (1 Peter 2:4-5), and the Church as the building housing God’s people (CCC 1179-1181), Sunday Mass

(Lk 22:19; CCC 1341-1344), bread and wine, the Passover (CCC 1340) and the Eucharist (Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39; CCC 1333-1335), the Last Supper (USCCA 216-217).

- Church Furnishings: the Altar (CCC 1182-1183), the ambo or lectern (CCC 1184), the Book of Readings (CCC 1154, page 886), the Cross/Crucifix (CCC 613-618, 2166), the Tabernacle (CCC 1183, 1379), the chair of the bishop or of the priest (CCC 1184).
- Parts of the Mass (Roman Rite): 1. Introductory Rites, 2. Liturgy of the Word, 3. Liturgy of the Eucharist (a. the Preparation of the Gifts b. the Eucharistic Prayer including Thanksgiving [Preface], the Acclamation [Holy, Holy], the Epiclesis [Invocation], the Institution Narrative and Consecration, the Anamnesis, Second Epiclesis, Intercessions, Doxology, and Great Amen [CCC 1352-1354], c. the Communion Rite [the Lord's Prayer, a sign of peace, Holy Communion]), and 4. the Concluding Rite (the priest's final blessing and the Dismissal).

### 3. *Summary of Teaching and Faith Response*

We gather at Mass to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate Christ's gift of his Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word includes readings from the Old Testament and the New Testament, a homily, intercessions, and a presentation of the offerings. The Liturgy of the Eucharist includes the Eucharistic Prayer, the preface, epiclesis, institution narrative, anamnesis, and intercessions (CCC 1352-1354). It also includes a Communion Rite consisting of the Lord's Prayer, a sign of peace, Holy Communion, the priest's final blessing and the dismissal.

### 4. *Prayer*

Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion binds us closer to Jesus Christ. Through this sharing in Communion, we are also bound more closely to one another as the Body of Christ. After receiving Holy Communion, ask God for the grace to be reconciled with those we

may have hurt or been hurt by. Spend some time in thanksgiving and praise to God. Pray also for and with all the Church (militant, suffering in Purgatory, triumphant)<sup>26</sup> remembering in a special way any special intentions you may have. Ask God's help for you to bear any hardships in imitation of Christ and in service to the Gospel (CCC 1368-1372).

May this memorial of Christ's death and Resurrection truly become the source and summit of the Christian life for all the baptized. May this feast of Word and Sacrament nourish all of us for the journey ahead. And may this celebration be an anticipation of our participation in future glory at the eternal banquet of the Lamb.

## **Penance and Reconciliation<sup>27</sup>** **(USCCA, Chap. 18)**

### 1. *Witness*

In one of his early interviews, Pope Francis was asked to describe himself. His response was immediate. "Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze."<sup>28</sup> With regards to how frequently he went to Confession, he stated in another interview that he goes to Confession every 15 days. On March 28, 2014, Pope Francis surprised even his aide by going to Confession in full view of the public before serving as confessor in St. Peter's Basilica. In this way, Pope Francis has repeatedly witnessed to the need for conversion in his own life. How ought we to act in light of Pope Francis' witness?

<sup>26</sup> CCC 1414.

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT) Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, quoting from *Homilies of Bede the Venerable*, who writes in his comments on the Gospel story of the calling of Matthew: "Jesus saw a publican, and since he looked at him with feelings of love and chose him, he said to him, 'Follow me.'" Fr. Antonio Spadero, "Interview with Pope Francis," Copyright © [2013] Libreria Editrice Vaticana.



The Church, which includes you and I, is both holy and always in need of purification. By committing ourselves to repentance and reform, sharing in the sufferings of Christ, performing works of mercy and charity, and conforming our lives ever more faithfully to the Gospel message with the help of the Holy Spirit, we become living signs to the world of conversion to God. In what ways are you a “sign of conversion” for others?

## 2. *Evangelical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Elements*

- Jesus forgave sins (Lk 5:17-26; 7:36-50). The parable of the prodigal son illustrates the meaning of his earthly ministry: to forgive sins, reconcile people to God, and lead all to true happiness (Lk 15:11-32).
- Sin is an offense against God which also damages communion with the Church.
- Penance and Reconciliation is one of the Seven Sacraments (CCC 1114-1116). Along with the Anointing of the Sick, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is one of the two Sacraments of Healing (CCC 1421).
- It is also called: the sacrament of conversion, Penance, confession, forgiveness, and Reconciliation (CCC 1423-1424).
- Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Penance (see Jn 20:19, 22-23) for those who fall into grave sin after Baptism (CCC 1446). Individual and integral confession of grave sins followed by absolution remains the ordinary means of reconciliation with God and with the Church (CCC 1497).
- Even after Baptism, we retain an inclination to sin (concupiscence), which requires us to seek ongoing interior conversion (CCC 1425-1429). Confession of one’s venial sins is recommended to help form one’s conscience, combat evil tendencies, and allow healing by Christ and strengthening by the Holy Spirit (CCC 1457-1458).
- The *Catechism* lists thirty-one ways for the Christian to express interior penance (CCC 1434-1439).
- The liturgical elements for the Rite of Penance normally include a greeting from the priest; the sign of the cross; an invitation to trust in God; a reading of the Word of God; confession of sins to the priest; imposition and acceptance of a penance; the priest’s

absolution and blessing; a prayer of praise and dismissal. If this is celebrated within the framework of a communal celebration, additional elements include a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common.

- Through worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the sinner is reconciled to God and restored to the state of grace; reconciled to the Church, to himself, and to all creation; remitted eternal punishment due to mortal sins; remitted temporal punishment, at least in part (satisfaction)<sup>29</sup>; restored to peace, serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; and receives an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle (CCC 1468-1470, 1496).

## 3. *Summary of Teaching and Faith Response*

Even before we consider the option of seeking forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, God is at work in our hearts (CCC 1430-1432). God the Father pursues us down the byways of our lives, intent to restore and share with us in greater measure a life of grace and union with him, which was secured at so great a cost through the saving death of his Son. The Spirit helps us to discern where sinfulness has wounded and enslaved us, and creates in the penitent a readiness to embrace ongoing conversion of life through sorrow for sins (contrition), confession made to the Church through the ministry of the priest, and a firm purpose of amendment.

“My brothers and sisters, confess your sins and pray for each other, that you may be healed” (Opening Prayer, Rites, 552-553). Until we have confessed that we have sinned, and *how*, we will find it hard to begin to own and address the evil that we have done, or to undertake a new life with contrition and a firm purpose of amendment. By God’s grace, frequent confession (CCC 1458) affords us the opportunity—through the work of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Church—“to form our conscience, fight against

<sup>29</sup> USCCA 240.

evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit” (CCC 1458).

#### 4. Prayer

Through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the faithful continue the conversion of life and commitment to the imitation of Christ, begun in Baptism. After you have completed the assigned penance, consider spending a few moments before a crucifix in Church, or at home in the days that follow. Meditate on Christ’s love for you, which is clearly made manifest in his teaching, and in his salvific death and Resurrection. Thank God for his mercy and forgiveness. You may find the following Scripture passages and *Catechism* references helpful for your reflection (Mt 6:9-15; Mt 18:21-35; Lk 6:27-36; CCC 2838-2845). Identify some ways you might become more merciful and forgiving of others, even as God the Father is merciful to you. Ask the Holy Spirit for his help in becoming a more forgiving person.

## Anointing of the Sick<sup>30</sup> (USCCA, Chap. 19)

### 1. Witness

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus showed great compassion for the sick and worked many healing miracles for those who believed. He used concrete signs to heal, such as the use of spittle and the laying on of hands, mud and washing (see Mk 7:32-36–8:22-25; Jn 9:6-7). This physical healing by Christ was preceded by spiritual healing from sin (Mk 2:5-12), anticipating Jesus’ ultimate victory over sin and death (CCC 1503-1507). He taught his followers to share in his ministry of compassion and healing, reminding them that whatever care they provided for the least was also done for him (see Mk 6:12-13; Mt 25:36; see also Acts 9:34–14:3).

<sup>30</sup> For more information, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012).

### 2. *Evangelical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Elements*

- The Anointing of the Sick is one of the Seven Sacraments. Along with the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is one of the two Sacraments of Healing (CCC 1421).
- Before the Second Vatican Council, it was referred to as “Extreme Unction” because it was conferred primarily upon those at the point of death (CCC 1512). Since the Second Vatican Council, this sacrament has been renamed the Anointing of the Sick to indicate that it is intended also for a broader group of baptized who are tried by illness (i.e. those in danger of death from sickness or injuries, serious surgery, old age), in the hope that the Lord might restore them to health and/or prepare them for eternal life: whichever is conducive to their salvation. This sacrament may be repeated should the recipient recover health and then experience another grave illness (CCC 1512-1515).
- When celebrated within the Mass, the Rite takes place after the homily and before the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The three essential elements of the sacrament are: the prayer of faith, the laying on of hands, and the anointing with oil (Rites, Pastoral Care of the Sick, 104-107).
- A bishop or a priest anoint the seriously ill on the forehead and hands (Latin Rite) or other parts of the body (Eastern Rite) with blessed oil while saying: “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” (CCC 1513). The form for the Eastern Catholic Churches is whatever is prescribed in the liturgical books for each “*Sui iuris Church*.” If circumstances allow, it is recommended that the Anointing of the Sick be preceded by the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and followed by the Sacrament of the Eucharist (CCC 1517).

- In some of the Eastern Churches, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is available to all the baptized on the Wednesday or Thursday before Easter and on certain other occasions, such as the context of a pilgrimage. In these Churches, the faithful are anointed according to the particular Eastern tradition.
- The effects of the Anointing of the Sick include a strengthening, peace, and courage to overcome the difficulties associated with serious illness or old age as a gift of the Holy Spirit; forgiveness of sins if the person was not able to obtain it through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation; restoration of health if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul; union with the passion of Christ; and a share in the saving work of Jesus. Through this sharing, the recipient contributes to the good of the People of God and is supported by the Church in preparation for his final journey back to God the Father through Christ. As Baptism began the recipient's conformity to the death and Resurrection of Christ, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick completes it (CCC 1520-1523).
- As preparation for the final journey at the end of life, and as a "passing over" from this life to eternity in union with the resurrected Christ, the seriously sick person receives Holy Viaticum (see CCC 1523-1525; see also Rites, Pastoral Care of the Sick, 26-28).

### 3. Summary of Teaching and Faith Response

James 5:14-15 describes the early Church's celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. This sacrament is for those who are seriously ill, in danger of death, or struggling with the effects of old age. It may be celebrated each time the believer falls seriously ill or the illness worsens (CCC 1529). It is administered by a priest or a bishop using the Oil of the Sick. The elements of the rite include the anointing of the forehead and hands, and sometimes other parts, accompanied by a prayer. The effects of the sacrament include: uniting the sick person with Christ's

passion; praying for the person's well-being and that of the Church; strengthening the person to endure patiently the sufferings of illness and old age; forgiveness of sins if the person was not able to receive the Sacrament of Penance; and preparation for passage to eternal life (USCCA 257-258).

### Questions for Reflection:

*Have you been present for the Anointing of the Sick celebrated in church, at the hospital, or in the home of a seriously ill person? Did you know that the Church urges all of the faithful who are seriously ill to avail themselves of the Sacrament (see Rites, Pastoral Care of the Sick, 8-15, 27-28)? Should you be a member of the family, a friend, or a caregiver for a seriously ill person, you may be called upon to serve in a variety of ways in the ministry of charity connected to the pastoral care of the seriously sick (see Rites, Pastoral Care of the Sick, 32-34). Pray to the Holy Spirit to prepare you for this important role.*

### 4. Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you chose to share our human nature,  
to redeem all people, and to heal the sick.  
Look with compassion upon your servants whom we have  
anointed in your name with this holy oil for  
the healing of their body and spirit.  
Support them with your power, comfort them  
with your protection,  
And give them the strength to fight against  
evil.  
Since you have given them a share in your  
own passion,  
Help them to find hope in suffering, for you  
are Lord for ever and ever. Amen

- From *Pastoral Care of the Sick*

## Marriage<sup>31</sup> (USCCA, Chap. 21)

### 1. *Witness*

Married life is a life of discipleship where married couples form a “domestic church” strengthened by daily prayer and the sacraments, commitment to discipleship, openness to life, and formation of children—should couples be blessed with them—in faith, in the virtues and in lives of charity (CCC 1666). The married couple’s bond of love, fidelity, and openness to the gift of life are a great witness of joy and hope. Despite the wounds inflicted by divorce, adultery, contraception, and other assaults on conjugal love, we can take courage in the knowledge that Christ is merciful and the source of our hope. As ambassadors of Christ’s joy and hope, married couples are invited to live their covenant promises fully, in good times and in bad (CCC 2365).

### 2. *Evangelical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Elements*

- Marriage is a vocation to self-giving love modeled on the covenant love of the Holy Trinity.
- Christian Marriage and Holy Orders are each a sacrament at the service of communion (CCC 1534-1535, 1601-1666).
- Jesus taught the indissolubility of marriage (CCC 1613; Mt 19:3-6; 1 Cor 7:10-11).
- The sacramental love of husband and wife reflects the love between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:31-32).
- The lifelong matrimonial covenant is oriented toward an intimate communion of life and love, the good of the spouses (unitive purpose), and the procreation (procreative purpose) and education of offspring (CCC 1601; CIC, c. 1055; CCEO, c. 776).
- Marriage requires fidelity between the spouses. By the grace of the sacrament and their mutual

fidelity, the spouses continue to make present to one another the love of Christ, to strengthen their covenant promises, and to experience a growth in holiness.

- In the Latin tradition, the couple who marry confers the sacrament upon each other through an exchange of consent in the presence of the Church’s minister (deacon, priest, or bishop), two witnesses, and the congregation, and an exchange of rings. The elements of marital consent include freedom of consent to marry, unity, indissolubility, and fruitfulness (CCC 1644-1651, 1664; USCCA 283-285).
- In the Eastern Churches, the sacrament is conferred by the blessing of a priest (but not a deacon) after receiving the couple’s consent.
- Couples seeking marriage who come from different Christian faith backgrounds (“mixed marriages”) are required to obtain permission to celebrate their marriage in a Catholic or a non-Catholic church. Where one of the parties is non-baptized, the couple celebrates a non-sacramental “interfaith” marriage.
- Catholics who experience divorce without remarriage are encouraged to take advantage of the Church’s pastoral care, and to participate in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. For those Catholics seeking to marry again after a marriage ends in divorce, they are encouraged to speak with their parish priest about the declaration of nullity process.

### 3. *Summary of Teaching and Faith Response*

Marriage is a vocation to self-giving love modeled on the covenant love of the Holy Trinity. Marriage is a God-given institution from the beginning, which God has raised up to the dignity of a sacrament. Through sacramental graces, every act of love binds the newlyweds closer to each other, and to God, enabling them to become a living sign that radiates Christ’s

<sup>31</sup> For more information, see USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies* (SACCAT) Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012).

spousal love for the Church.<sup>32</sup> Their simple acts of love, patience, forgiveness, and sacrifice all become bound up in something greater: Christ present with, in, and for their marriage.

By gathering and celebrating marriage in a church, the newlyweds invite God into their marriage. They can be assured that through the grace of the sacrament God will continue to be with them. Couples are urged to open themselves up to God's invitation to love as he loves, and to follow Christ in giving themselves totally and exclusively to one another, without reserve, for the rest of their lives (CCC 1644-1651, 1664; USCCA 283-285. See also CCC 1601, 1652, 1664; USCCA 279-282). As they learn to depend totally upon God, he will help them be faithful to their wedding vows and to attain holiness (see Vat II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 11; CCC 1641-1642; USCCA 1984). Remind them to thank God every day for his grace and mercy. Encourage them to pray together as a couple, and to go to Mass together (see CCC 1131). Urge them to use the Ten Commandments as their guide for moral decisions. Finally, let them be sure to forgive one another and go often to Confession, drinking deeply from the sacrament of God's mercy.

They are reminded that the divine love they share as a couple is given for them to share with others (CCC 1534-1535; CCCC 321): with each other, with any children that God may bless them with (their domestic church), and with an ever growing circle of extended family, friends, and even strangers who are blessed with their love and friendship. The world needs their Christian witness of love and fidelity and openness to the gift of life. As Christ's

followers, these married couples are called to be brave disciples and witnesses of joy and hope.

#### 4. *Prayer*

Let us pray for (name the married couple) and all married couples that they may generously respond to the graces of their vocation. May they demonstrate daily self-giving and sacrificial love for each other. May they grow more deeply in love, signaling that, through simple acts of love, patience, forgiveness, and sacrifice, they may become bound up in something greater: Christ present with, in, and for their marriage. May they continue daily to renew their mutual gift of self, and experience how the graces of the sacrament enable them to be faithful to their spouses and to attain holiness (CCC 1641-1642). May their married lives reflect a life of discipleship rooted in home life, regular participation in the sacramental life of their parish, and a willingness to serve others. May they also be ambassadors and witnesses of joy, hope, and trust in the Lord. May their communion as husband and wife be a blessing for them, their children (should they be so blessed), and extended family and friends who look to them for support. And may their home be a place of love, forgiveness, peace, and blessing for all who enter. We ask this through Christ the Lord. Amen.

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32 See Eph 5:21-32.