

THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

Introduction:

The two ordinary means of grace are prayer and the sacraments. The sacraments are seven (as defined at the Council of Trent), and they are the “*institutions of divine favor*.”

Definition:

Etymologically, the term “sacrament” means “sacred secret”, and therefore applies to those who carry within themselves a hidden holiness.

A sacrament is:

1. a sensitive sign, perceptible by our senses
2. instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ
3. to produce or increase grace

I. A SIGN IS A REALITY THAT REFERS TO ANOTHER REALITY

E.g.: The traffic sign warns of a dangerous curve on the right that cannot yet be seen. This is a sign. Here, the sign can be seen, but the reality it refers to cannot yet be seen.

The visible sign of the sacraments, **the ritual performed**, therefore **indicates a hidden reality: grace**.

ATTENTION! In the sacraments, the sensible sign does not merely make grace known; it produces it and is its cause.

Leo XIII: “*The sacrament signifies what it produces and produces what it signifies.*”

In other words, the sacrament is effective in itself and not through the dispositions brought to it (*see below*). This is the great difference between the sacraments of the Old Testament (*and the sacramentals of today*) and those of the New Testament. The former (*circumcision, the Paschal Lamb, etc.*) conferred grace because of the faith in the Promise and not by themselves (*the same applies to holy water, ashes, blessings, candles, palms, etc.*).

In this respect, the sacraments are truly wonders of God’s goodness and mercy.

II. ONLY GOD CAN GIVE GRACE AND CAN THEREFORE INSTITUTE THE SACRAMENTS

It is highly fitting that it was Jesus Christ who instituted them because He can (*being God*) and because He is, through His humanity, God and His Grace in the visible world (*God was made visible through Jesus Christ!*).

Our Lord sanctified the sensible elements of the sacraments (*for example, water in his baptism*) while these elements sanctify us.

III. TWO SACRAMENTS PRODUCE GRACE: BAPTISM AND PENANCE.

They bring those who are not in the state of grace into the state of grace, and they are made for this purpose. Therefore, one can receive them without already having sanctifying grace. The other five are made to increase grace: it is therefore necessary to already have it, otherwise one commits a mortal sin, a sacrilege.

IV. BECAUSE IN THE SACRAMENT, GRACE IS ALWAYS GIVEN, AS LONG AS IT IS VALID.

But grace is not always received, due to a lack of disposition. That is why this most precious thing is desecrated, and whoever does so commits sacrilege.

“*The sacraments give grace, but they do not give the dispositions necessary to receive them.*” (Fr. Emmanuel)

These provisions are always:

- Faith
- Right intention
- The state of grace (except for baptism and penance)

V. IN A SACRAMENT, WE DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE MATTER AND THE FORM WHICH CONSTITUTE THE SUBSTANCE OF THE SACRAMENT

It cannot vary in any way, since it comes from Christ's institution. The matter suggests the signification; the form specifies it. We distinguish between remote matter and proximate matters.

SACRAMENTS	REMOTE MATTER	PROXIMATE MATTER	FORM
Baptism	Water	Ablution	"I baptise you..."
Confirmation	Holy Chrism	Unction	"I sign you..."
Eucharist	Bread Wine	Offering	"This is my body..." "This is my blood..."
Penance	Sins	Contrition Confession Reparation	"I absolve you from..."
Extreme Unction	Huile des malades	Unction	"Through this holy anointing..."
Marriage	The spouses	Self-giving in marriage	Consent: "Yes"
Order	Laying on of hands		Prayer of the <i>consecratory preface</i>

VI. THREE SACRAMENTS GIVE CHARACTER

Namely: An indelible spiritual mark in the soul, compared by the Fathers of the Church to a seal in wax.

This character is a power:

- (<i>passive</i>)	Baptism	Child of God
- (<i>passive</i>)	Confirmation	Witness of Christ
- (<i>active</i>)	Order	Minister of Christ

Ability

It is from this character, always conferred in a valid sacrament, that the graces of these sacraments derive. This explains why these graces – *if they were not received through the fault of the recipient* – can be revived when they are rediscovered.

These three sacraments are therefore never repeated (*while all others can be renewed*).

VII. VALIDITY

For a sacrament to be validly administered, the following conditions must be met:

- The matter
- The form
- The appropriate minister, with a suitable intention

The intention is proper when the minister does what the Church wants (even if he does not have faith).

This intention on the part of the minister is presumed when he does what the Church asks.

For these sacraments:	The minister is...	
	Ordinary	or extraordinary
Baptism	priest (or delegated deacon)	every man (even non-Christians)
Marriage	the spouses →	idem
Order	the bishop alone →	idem
Confirmation	the bishop	the priest
For all others:	the priest alone... (and therefore the bishop)	
Extreme-Unction		
Penance		
Eucharist		