

# Sacrament

A CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING



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# A Sacramental People

Catholics have a sacramental view of the world. There is always more to anything than meets the eye. Our understanding of sacrament begins with our belief that God is everywhere; present in and through all of creation. There is no thing or experience from which God is absent.

Like all Christians, Catholics believe that Jesus is the sacrament of God. In Jesus we see, hear and experience God perfectly. There are no gaps. This is why Jesus is our way, our truth and our life.



We also believe that the Church – in Christ – is a sacrament. By ‘in Christ’ we believe that the Church is a sacrament because it draws its life from Christ and is constantly shaped by Christ. We say the Church has a sacramental nature; that it reveals the face and love of God in and through its communal life, liturgy and mission.

In and through the liturgy, as individuals and a community, we become a sacramental people; people who live like Jesus - loving, forgiving, challenging, healing, inviting others to be the best people they can be.

A sacramental Church then names seven key liturgical actions as sacraments because they both express and shape our Catholic identity for the sake of mission:

- Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist - Sacraments of initiation into the Catholic faith community
- Penance (formerly called Confession) and Anointing of the Sick (formerly called Extreme Unction) - Sacraments of forgiveness and healing
- Holy Orders and Marriage: Sacraments of loving service.

Together these seven sacraments both mark key moments in our lives and sustain us throughout life's journey. They shape the Church to be a sacrament and us to be a sacramental people.

## Sacraments of Initiation

The initiative is always with God. God created us in God's image and breathed the breath of the divine life into us. God loves us as we are and invites us to share in the divine life: to be one with God; immersed in God; held by God; encircled by a love that knows no bounds.

Those who choose to accept this invitation to live in relationship with God within the Catholic faith do so by participating in the process of Christian Initiation. This is how we express our YES to God.

This process has three key steps: baptism, confirmation, eucharist.

### Baptism

Baptism is the first sacrament of Christian Initiation. In baptism we are made one with Christ and a member of the Church. We are claimed by Christ when we are marked with the sign of the cross and joined to Christ as we are baptised with water – in the name the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We are anointed with oil, clothed in our baptismal garment and given our baptismal candle. All these actions are signs that we have committed ourselves to the life long journey of putting on Christ and making the mind of Christ our own.

As we take our place as new members of the Catholic Church we know that the community, its liturgy and prayer, and the mission of God it pursues, will sustain us on this journey.

The sacrament of baptism is received only once. Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church recognises the validity of baptism in the other Christian churches who baptise with water using the Trinitarian formulae.

## Confirmation

Confirmation is the second Sacrament of Christian Initiation. The Bishop, as leader of the diocesan Church community (or his delegate) administers confirmation.



Through the Laying on of Hands and Anointing with Chrism our baptismal commitment is confirmed.

Through the gifts of the Holy

Spirit – wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord – we are strengthened to live more truly and responsibly as disciples of Jesus and members of the Church committed to pursuing the mission of Jesus today.

## Eucharist

The process of Christian Initiation is completed when the person comes to the table to receive communion for the first time

We believe eucharist makes the Church

- in the gathering of the community, on Sunday – the Lord's day,
- in listening to, and reflecting on, God's word spoken to us in the scripture

- in the offering of our lives to God by joining ourselves to Christ's offering
- in our personal and communal transformation in this action
- in our being sent to live as disciples of Jesus, continuing the mission of Jesus in the world.

The Church is made and I become a disciple as I return each Sunday to gather with the community to be nourished by the Word of God and the Body of Christ. This is how we pursue the life long process of initiating ourselves into the life of God.



When we 'do' Eucharist in this way, a wonderful transformation can happen within us and within our families, our society and in our world.

## Sacraments of Healing

God loves us as we are. God's mercy is boundless. It is hard for us to believe this. We do not earn God's love. It is not offered because we are worthy. God just loves us. Intrinsic to this boundless love is God's equally boundless mercy and forgiveness. All we have to do is ask, and it is given, allowing us to begin again, re-directed and renewed in our commitment to Jesus as our way, our truth and our life. And so the Catholic Church has a Rite of Penance.

We all know some story from the Gospels where Jesus heals someone who is ill or suffering. As Christians we believe that Jesus is with us in

every human experience, including when we are ill, burdened or suffering in any way. Jesus stands with us offering us love and peace, strength and healing. And so the Church has the Sacrament of Anointing the sick.

## The Rite of Penance

Penance comes from a Greek word that means to change direction. It is the sacrament that helps us acknowledge the frailty and limits of our humanity. By honestly owning, naming and expressing sorrow for our failures, we can experience forgiveness which in turn, deepens our capacity to love.

The Sacrament of Penance then allows us to start afresh and re-invigorates our baptismal commitment to be 'other Christs' in the world.

This Sacrament is celebrated by 3 different Rites of Reconciliation:

**Rite 1:** In the light of God's Word, the individual penitent confesses to the priest, expressing sorrow for words, actions or omissions that have hurt others. By laying on of hands, the sign of the Cross and words of absolution, the priest mediates the mercy and forgiveness of God and of the Community.

**Rite 2:** Highlights the community dimension of sin. Members of the community gather with several priests to review their lives in the light of God's Word and acknowledge their sinfulness. After individual confession and absolution, this Rite concludes with communal prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

**Rite 3:** Also highlights the communal dimension of sin. The community gathers, usually with one priest, and together acknowledges sinfulness and sorrow and general absolution is given. This Rite is reserved for times of crisis or emergency e.g. when soldiers are going into battle.

The Rite of Penance also includes the option for Penitential Services. These can be prepared by the community to respond to any communal

need for healing and forgiveness. They do not require an ordained minister.

## Anointing of the Sick

This sacrament continues Jesus' ministry of care and compassion to the sick and frail in our communities. Sickness and pain can often be a heavy burden for people. When the priest, in the name of the faith community, anoints the person with the Oil of the Sick, the strengthening power of oil and the comfort of touch remind the sick person that they are not alone in their suffering, but held in prayer by the Community.

This realisation can bring peace of mind and sometimes even healing of the body.

Since Vatican II, the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick has undergone both a change of name (no longer Extreme Unction) and meaning. It is no longer a sacrament for those at the point of death. Rather the appropriate time is whenever any one of the faithful is sick.

## Sacraments of Service

God created us in God's own image. We are made for relationship and community. The greatest commandment is to love – God, self and neighbour.

In the life of Christ we see and hear about love being poured out for the other. It is in giving that we receive and become our best selves.

So at the heart of the Church's life are two sacraments that celebrate the priority of love given in service of others: The Sacrament of Marriage and The Sacrament of Holy Orders.

## Marriage

In the sacrament of Marriage (Matrimony) a man and woman publically commit to give themselves to each other in a loving, faithful and life-long relationship. Unlike other sacraments, the couple minister this sacrament to each other. The priest is present as a witness, in the name of God and of the Community.

Rings are exchanged as signs of the permanence of this loving relationship and are a constant reminder of the daily, life-giving graces which married couples receive through their sacrament.

The sacrament of Marriage is important for the wider community because it reminds us of the faithful, never-ending love that God has for humanity and highlights the giving-unto-death love that was so much a part of Jesus' living and dying.

When children are born within the marriage relationship, the whole community rejoices because this particular family, the domestic church, is contributing to the ongoing life and continuity of the faith community.

## Holy Orders

The Sacrament of Holy Orders is received by deacons, priests and bishops who are called to the ministry of loving service in the Catholic Church.

Their ministry is modelled on the person of Jesus Christ, who was:

- **Priest** – offering himself in praise of and thanks to God and mediating the love of God, liturgically and in the opportunities of every day;



- **Prophet** – proclaiming the Word of God and promoting justice, liturgically and in everyday life
- **Servant-king** – the servant leader who washed the feet of the disciples both at the Last Supper in in his everyday life

Deacons are called to the service of charity which is expressed through some form of service to society as directed by the bishop. This ministry becomes the context for their liturgical ministry within a parish.

Priests and bishops are called to the service of leadership within the Catholic community.

## Acknowledgements

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## More information

Details on sacraments can be sourced from our diocesan contacts.

### Sacraments of Initiation

#### Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist

Contact your local parish within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.  
Details are available at <https://www.mn.catholic.org.au/places/parishes/>.

### Sacraments of Healing

#### Rite of Penance, Anointing of the Sick

Contact your local parish within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.  
Details are available at <https://www.mn.catholic.org.au/places/parishes/>.

### Sacraments of Service

#### Marriage

CatholicCare Marriage Education

**E** [marriageeducation@catholiccare.org.au](mailto:marriageeducation@catholiccare.org.au) **P** 02 4979 1370

#### Holy Orders

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