

GRACE IN THE SACRAMENTS

The Latin word 'sacramentum' means a 'sign of the sacred'. The seven sacraments are ceremonies that point to what is sacred, holy. They are special occasions for experiencing God's saving presence and receiving God's grace. They are signs and instruments of His grace.

BAPTISM: The first step in a journey of commitment and discipleship. It is a celebration of God's welcoming.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST: A meal in which Jesus is present, when we celebrate His death for us. As we receive Christ's body and blood, we are nourished spiritually and brought closer to God.

RECONCILIATION, or PENANCE: There are three elements to this – conversion, confession and celebration. In it we find God's unconditional forgiveness, and we are called to forgive.

CONFIRMATION signifies mature Christian commitment, and is a strengthening of the gifts given in baptism. It is the second part of initiation into Christ and the Church.

MARRIAGE: This is a public sign that a person is giving themselves completely to another. It is also a public statement about God: the loving union of husband and wife speaks of family values and God's values.

HOLY ORDERS, or ORDINATION: The priest being ordained promises to lead other Anglicans by offering them the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), by proclaiming the Gospel, and by providing other means to holiness.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK: A ritual of healing, for physical, mental, spiritual or emotional healing.

Sacraments are 'efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. We have to receive the sacraments with the right disposition, in order for them to bear fruit in our lives. They assume that faith is present in the recipient, and nourish, strengthen and express that faith. Each sacrament has a particular grace, such as incorporation

into Christ and the Church, forgiveness of sins, or consecration (setting apart) for a particular service. The sacraments involve mystery, so it is impossible to pinpoint the precise moment when God's grace is imparted. We cannot know exactly their effect. God uses elements and objects to touch us: water, wine, bread, oil, etcetera. In the Eucharist, some believe the consecrated bread and wine have become the body and blood of Christ; some believe that they are symbols and, when we receive and consume them, we are nourished with the life of Christ.

What we believe about the grace received in each of the Sacraments:

BAPTISM – new birth, by the Spirit; cleansing and forgiveness; salvation; death to the old sinful nature; membership of the Church; power to overcome sin and evil; the Christian virtues; eternal life; adoption as God's children; inheritors of God's kingdom. A baby or small child is too young to repent or believe, but God is able to begin a process of new life, and a new relationship.

CONFIRMATION – the strengthening gift of the Holy Spirit for worship, witness and service. Confirmands are commissioned and empowered to fulfil their vocation.

EUCCHARIST – nourishing with the life of Christ

MARRIAGE – continuing grace to love unselfishly and be faithful. The couple is bound together by the Holy Spirit in a holy union. Grace is requested, in order that they may bear children and raise them in faith and virtue. The grace of sanctification (being purified, to conform to the image of Christ) for the couple is sought.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK – forgiveness from sin; cleansing; healing of the body, soul and spirit; release from pain; new life, and strength; joy and peace; sanctification; assurance of God's presence (especially for the dying, in the last rights); assurance of God's love.

ORDINATION – grace to fulfil the person's particular role and duties, including oversight, pastoral care and service, administration of Word and Sacrament. Deacons have a particular calling to serve, and meet other needs; priests have a calling to be shepherds: deacons and priests need grace, in order to do this. Grace is needed, in order to be faithful, to hold to the truth, to be holy, to make Christ's

love known, to assist in leading worship, to teach, to advance the Gospel, to be steady and trustworthy in faith, to be full of faith, to witness to Christ, to proclaim Christ, to follow Christ, to make disciples, to baptize and confirm, to lead in prayer, to read the Scriptures, to preside at the Eucharist, to intercede for God's people, to teach and encourage from the Scriptures, to help people to use their God-given gifts, to share leadership, to rebuke sin, to pronounce forgiveness (absolve), to care for the sick, to bring back those who have strayed, to guide their people through life, to prepare people for death, to promote unity, peace and love, to have God's wisdom, and to discipline, when needed, appropriately.

CONFESSION and ABSOLUTION – forgiveness and reconciliation, cleansing; to enable inner peace, to give counsel, guidance and new strength, to help the person to have firm resolve to think and act differently, with God's help.