SEPTEM SACRAMENTA

The Seven Sacraments

Seven channels of grace by which Christ accompanies the soul from birth to death: three that give life and strength, two that heal, and two that serve the Church and the family.

"Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God." — 1 Corinthians 4:1



Rogier van der Weyden, Seven Sacraments Altarpiece, c. 1445–50, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp. Around the Cross, angels hover over each sacrament.

A sacrament is **an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace**. Each has its *matter* (the thing or action used) and its *form* (the words spoken), and gives grace by its own power, *ex opere operato*, to all who place no obstacle.

The Council of Trent defined that there are seven sacraments of the New Law, "neither more nor less," all instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ. They flow, as the Fathers say, from His pierced side on the Cross, as van der Weyden painted.

I Baptism

Baptismus · Mt 28:19; Jn 3:5

MATTER Natural water, poured on the head (or by immersion) while the words are said

FORM *Ego te baptizo in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*

MINISTER Priest or deacon; in danger of death, anyone with the right intention

Washes away original sin, all actual sin and all punishment due; makes us children of God, members of the Church and heirs of Heaven.

Once · imprints a character · sacrament of the dead

II Confirmation

Confirmatio · Acts 8:14–17

MATTER Anointing of the forehead with holy chrism, with the imposition of the hand

FORM *Signo te signo crucis, et confirmo te chrismate salutis. In nomine Patris...*

MINISTER The bishop (a priest by special faculty)

Gives the Holy Ghost with His seven gifts, making us strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Christ. The bishop's light blow on the cheek reminds us to suffer for the Faith.

Once · imprints a character · sacrament of the living

III Holy Eucharist

Sanctissima Eucharistia · Mt 26:26–28; Jn 6

MATTER Wheaten bread and wine of the grape

FORM *Hoc est enim Corpus meum. · Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis mei...*

MINISTER A validly ordained priest

By transubstantiation, the true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. Both a sacrifice (the Mass) and a sacrament; nourishes the soul and unites it to Christ.

Often, even daily · requires the state of grace and the Eucharistic fast

IV Penance

Paenitentia · Jn 20:22–23

MATTER The acts of the penitent: contrition, confession and satisfaction

FORM *Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*

MINISTER A priest with faculties to hear confessions

Forgives sins committed after Baptism and restores sanctifying grace if lost by mortal sin. Called "the second plank after shipwreck."

As often as needed · sacrament of the dead

V Extreme Unction

Extrema Unctio · Jas 5:14–15

MATTER Olive oil blessed by the bishop (*oleum infirmorum*), anointing the eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, hands and feet

FORM *Per istam sanctam unctionem et suam piissimam misericordiam, indulgeat tibi Dominus quidquid per visum... deliquisti.*

MINISTER A priest

Given to the baptised in danger of death from sickness or old age. Strengthens the soul for its last combat, remits venial sins and the remains of sin, and restores bodily health if God wills.

In each serious illness · with Viaticum and the Apostolic Blessing

VI Holy Orders

Ordo · Lk 22:19; 2 Tim 1:6

MATTER The imposition of hands by the bishop (Pius XII, *Sacramentum Ordinis*, 1947)

FORM *The essential words of the consecration preface for each order*

MINISTER A bishop

Gives the power to offer the Holy Sacrifice, forgive sins and sanctify the faithful. Three sacred degrees: deacon, priest, bishop. In the traditional rite they are preceded by tonsure, the four minor orders and the subdiaconate.

Once for each degree · imprints a character

VII Matrimony

Matrimonium · Mt 19:6; Eph 5:32

MATTER The mutual consent of a baptised man and woman, expressed outwardly

FORM *The words of consent: "I take thee..." — the spouses themselves*

MINISTER The spouses confer it on each other; the priest is the Church's official witness

A lifelong, indissoluble bond, an image of Christ's union with the Church. Gives grace to love each other faithfully and to raise children for God.

Once, for life · sacrament of the living

Sacraments of the Dead and of the Living

Baptism and Penance are "of the dead": they give the life of grace to souls dead in sin. The other five are "of the living": they must be received in the state of grace, and receiving them knowingly in mortal sin is a sacrilege.

The Indelible Character

Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders imprint on the soul a spiritual mark that can never be erased, in this life or the next. They can therefore never be repeated.

The Sacramentals

Holy water, blessed candles, medals, scapulars, ashes and blessings are sacramentals, instituted by the Church. They obtain graces through the Church's prayer, not by their own power like the sacraments.