

Sacrament

The Book of Common Prayer

The Anglican Book of Common Prayer defines a sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a **means** whereby we receive the same, and a **pledge** to assure us thereof".

Ligonier Ministries (R.C. Sproul)

In His grace and in His wisdom, God has provided ways by which we can regularly have our faith in His promises fortified. Historically, we have referred to these ways of strengthening our faith as the ordinary means of grace. Prayer, the preaching of the Word, and the sacraments are not elaborate or fancy methods of giving us what we need to confirm our trust in Christ. To an outside observer, they do not seem special at all. After all, they make use of rather common things such as human speech, bread, wine, and water. But by faith and the work of the Spirit, these common elements are used to do an uncommon work — the confirmation of our trust in Jesus and the strengthening of our wills to flee from sin and rest in Christ alone.

Preaching is not a powerless human explanation of the biblical text, for the Spirit accompanies it so that God's Word achieves its purposes (Isa. 55:10–11). Prayer is more than empty words; it establishes communion between us and the Creator, thereby empowering us for belief and faithful, effective service (James 5:16b–18). Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not mere memorials that we do simply because Jesus tells us to do them; rather, we participate mysteriously in Christ Himself when by faith we take part in these ordinances (1 Cor. 10:16).

Question and answer 65 of the Heidelberg Catechism emphasize the role of the sacraments in confirming our faith. They bless us as we receive them in faith, and if we neglect them, we weaken our trust in God's work.

The sacraments are mysteries in that we cannot explain fully what God accomplishes through them. We do know, however, that they are more than memorial observations. They become effectual means of grace to those with faith by the working of the Holy Spirit (WLC, Q. 161). To downplay their importance is to desupernaturalize our holy religion, so let us have a high view of the sacraments as confirming signs of God's Word.

1) "A sacrament is an outward sign" – a SIGN points out from itself to something else. E.g., a red light means stop, it has one single meaning and usually an arbitrary one.

But sacraments are more than "outward signs," they are SYMBOLS which have multiple meanings which point into themselves, into their own depth to express what cannot be expressed in any other way. They bring us in touch with the familiar and mysterious simultaneously.

For example, a wedding ring is a symbol with multilayered meanings, e.g. it

indicates the person wearing it is not single; it is also symbolic of the mystery of love between two people who become symbols for others of the mystery of the love God has for his people. Similarly the waters of Baptism symbolize life and death, washing and cleansing, and the mystery of new life out of death. The bread and wine of Communion are symbolic of God's care, nourishment, love, nurture and sacrifice for us; and of our care, sharing, love, nurture, nourishment and sacrifice for one another.

We should never think of the sacraments as apart from life.

All must be appreciated as peak moments that heighten and celebrate the sacramentality of life in the world. Note that all the sacraments are symbolized by the "ordinary" of life, by bread, wine, water, oil, touch, words, gestures, and lovemaking in marriage. Each symbolizes something profoundly everyday that by the power of God's Spirit continues the saving mission of Jesus, enacting a peak moment in the divine-human partnership. As theologian Rosemary Haughton writes, "Sacraments are extraordinary experiences of the ordinary."

2) "Instituted by Christ." Jesus didn't walk along with the disciples and say, "Aha, I'll call it Baptism, Communion ... and the outward signs will be water....bread....wine, etc. The sacraments arise out of the story of Jesus' life and actions, and flow from his values and teachings. He allowed himself to be baptized, and he broke bread and shared it—out of those special events come Baptism and Communion. He saw very basic values and experiences (forgiveness, concern for the sick, marriage, service) and he transformed those ordinary human values into spiritual values by helping people see God's love made visible through the living of those values.

So while sacraments were not necessarily set forth in every detail by Jesus, they were instituted by him because, clearly, they come from him. As we celebrate the sacraments, Jesus is present to us as he was to the early Church. In Jesus we encounter God's presence. Jesus is the one great sacrament through which all other sacraments make sense.

3) "To give grace." Most of us grew up with the notion that the sacraments provided us with something called grace which we were somehow lacking. But grace (the self-gift of God) is already there. Because it is always present, it frequently goes unnoticed. A sacrament makes grace present for you by bringing it to your attention, by allowing you to see it. It mediates God's grace with heightened effect. Each sacrament is a way of meeting Christ and receiving the particular grace it symbolizes, be that of initiating, empowering, sustaining, forgiving, healing, serving or bonding.

Article http://www.rescathroch.org/learn/sacraments/sacrament_origins.pdf

The Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

These questions will help you prepare your mind and heart:

Do I know myself to be a sinful human being without hope of eternal life except for God's mercy in Christ?

Do I believe that his body was broken in place of mine and that his blood was shed for my sins?

Has and is my heart being renewed by the Holy Spirit?

Do I determine to live to live a godly life in the fellowship of the church, seeking the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?

In the event you cannot answer a sincere yes to the above questions, please speak to a Pastor or one of the Elders of our church.