

Liturgy Lessons: 2018



episode # 7: "Sacramental Signs"

The Catholic Church teaches that a sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace.

A sacrament is comprised of two parts: **the perceptible sign**. It is something we can see, or smell, or touch, or taste, or hear. In the tradition, this is called the "*sacramentum*." Then there is **the invisible reality**, called the "*res*" by the tradition. It is ultimately the grace of God.

We should consider these two things in every sacramental experience. Ideally the meaning of the sacramental sign should be evident. For this to happen, though, we must be completely invested in the Christian culture from which the meaning flows.

Baptism provides a great example, because to the Christian mind, water (the sacramental sign) is not simply a chemical formula: " H_2O ." It takes its meaning, not from science, but from the scriptures: Creation (Gn 1:2), the Great Flood (Gn 7), the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 12-14), the Jordan Gos 3-5; Mt 3; Mk 1; Lk 3), the blood and water flowing from the side of Christ Gn 19: 34). Water for Christians means cleansing, washing, and purifying.

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

... the visible signs used by the liturgy to signify invisible divine things have been chosen by Christ or the Church. Thus not only when things are read "which were written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace. (no. 33)

The Catechism

"From where do the sacramental signs come? Some come from created things (light, water, fire, bread, wine, oil); others come from social life (washing, anointing, breaking of bread).

Still others come from the history of salvation in the Old Covenant (the Passover rites, the sacrifices, the laying on of hands, the consecrations). These signs, some of which are normative and unchangeable, were taken up by Christ and are made the bearers of his saving and sanctifying action."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), no. 237

IN THE TRADITION

There can be no religious society, whether the religion be true or false, without some sacrament or visible symbol to serve as a bond of union. The importance of these sacraments cannot be overstated, and only scoffers will treat them lightly.

Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Faustum*, n°. 19.11

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

What sacramental signs are most visible to you at the celebration of Mass?

Today's Liturgy Lesson is one part of a thirty three part package intended to help us understand and embrace our experience of the Sunday Mass. Past lessons will be available upon request.

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