

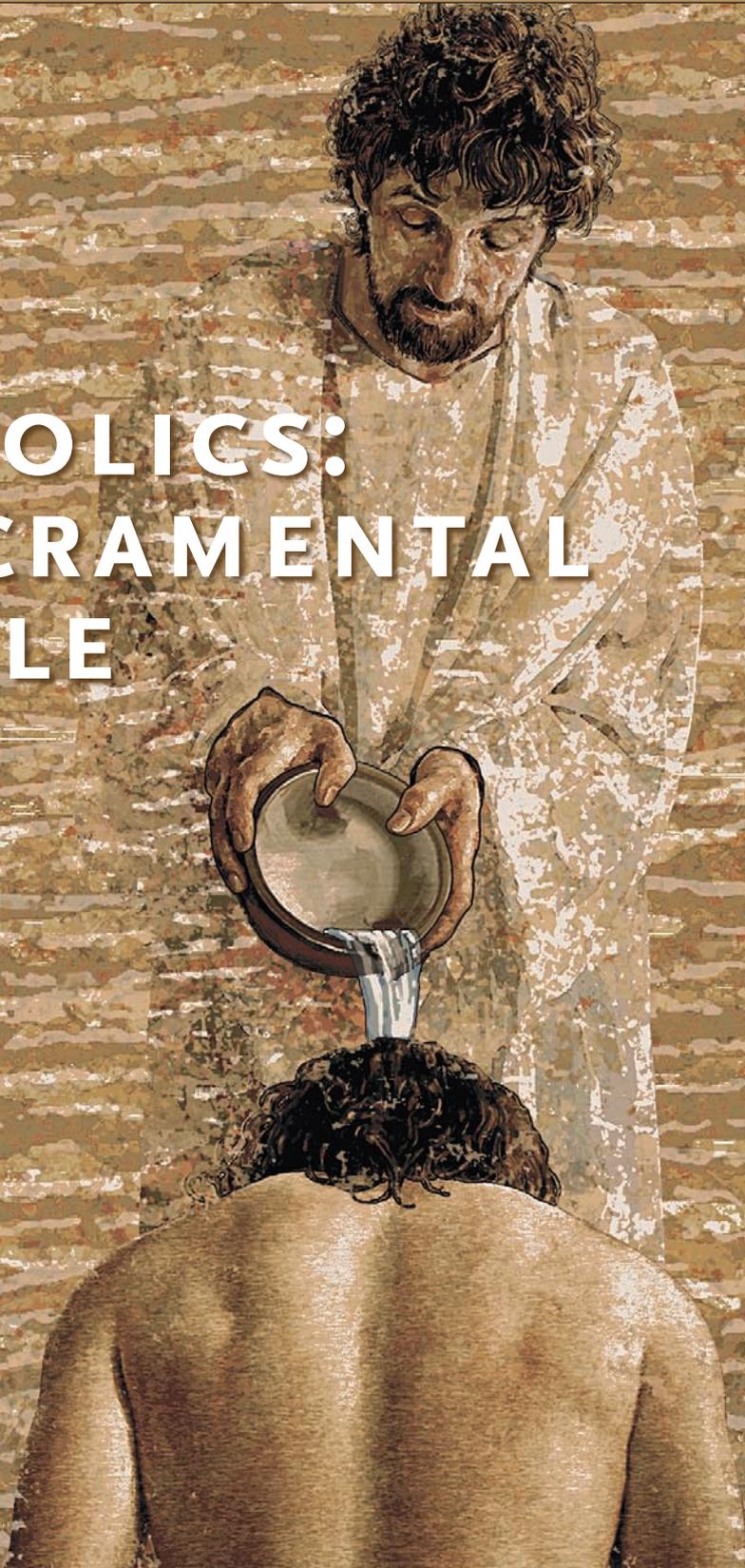
the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY CENTER BOSTON COLLEGE

C21 Resources

SPRING 2012

A CATALYST AND RESOURCE FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

**CATHOLICS:
A SACRAMENTAL
PEOPLE**





ABOUT THE EDITOR

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The Church in the 21st Century Center serves as a catalyst and a resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church in the United States.

FROM THE C21 CENTER DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

The 2011–12 academic year marks the ninth year since the Church in the 21st Century initiative was established by Fr. William P. Leahy, S.J., president of Boston College. And the current issue of *C21 Resources* on Catholics: A Sacramental People is the 18th in the series of *Resources* that spans this period.

The center was founded in the midst of the clerical sexual abuse crisis that was revealed in Boston and the nation in 2002. C21 was intended to be the University's response to this crisis and set as its mission the goals of becoming a catalyst and resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church by focusing on four focal issues:

- handing on the faith;
- relationships and sexuality in the Catholic Church;
- roles and relationships in the Church; and
- the Catholic intellectual tradition.

In the past nine years, the center has sponsored 350 on-campus events, welcomed to campus 400 prominent scholars and Church leaders, drawn 50,000 participants to its programs, created a robust website with hundreds of thousands of visitors, distributed *C21 Resources* to 160,000 readers twice a year on topics important to the Catholic community, established a book series that currently includes 10 volumes, and developed a presence in the world of social media on Facebook, YouTube, and even a C21 app. With the continuing generous support of the president's office and the rich collaborations the center has established with departments and schools throughout the University, we have no intention of slowing down.

This issue of *C21 Resources* follows the fall issue that focused on the Eucharist by exploring how Catholics are essentially a sacramental people. We have the good fortune to have as guest editor Fr. John F. Baldwin, S.J., professor of historical and liturgical theology in the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. Fr. Baldwin edited the Fall Resources, one of our most popular issues, and with minimal persuasion agreed to edit the current issue. We are most grateful for his expertise and generosity.

We hope that you find Catholics: A Sacramental People an illuminating and inspiring experience.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Newton
Interim Director, Church in the 21st Century Center
Special Assistant to the President

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CATHOLICS: A SACRAMENTAL PEOPLE

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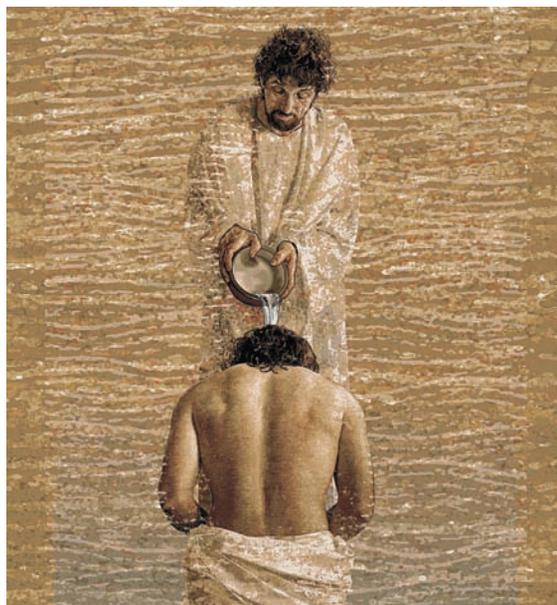
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ON THE COVER

In 1999 artist John Nava was commissioned by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to create three major cycles of tapestries for the new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. The cover image is one of those tapestries and is a depiction of Jesus being baptized by St. John the Baptist in the River Jordan. This tapestry is forty seven and a half feet high and seven feet wide.

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Catholics: A Sacramental People

JOHN F. BALDOVIN, S.J.

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

The first line of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem (printed in full on the opposite page) is a fine starting point for considering the importance of sacraments and sacramentality for Catholics. The best of our Catholic tradition has always shown an immense respect for and appreciation of the goodness of God’s creation. Put simply, we don’t believe that it’s necessary to flee the world and created things to encounter God. On the contrary, because of the goodness of creation and especially because God chose to commit himself irrevocably to humankind and our created world in the Incarnation, we believe that God encounters us through what He has made. Put another way, God doesn’t communicate His life to us despite our created, physical, human condition but precisely in the midst of it.

Moreover, a number of 20th-century Catholic theologians (especially Karl Rahner, S.J. and Edward Schillibeeckx, O.P.) helped us to recover the idea that in a fundamental way Christ is THE sacrament of God and that the Church is the primary sacrament of Christ in the world. It’s on this basis that we can understand the seven sacraments of the Church as genuine engagements with Christ through his Church. Each of the individual sacraments helps us to encounter the Incarnate Lord Jesus and to enter into the effects of his saving passion, death, and resurrection in a different way. It’s been said, and quite correctly I think, that we better understand the sacraments as verbs than as nouns. In other words, they are the actions of the Risen Lord transforming us more and more into His Body. This is a fine way to appreciate our participation in Christ’s returning creation back to the Father by our common participation in His priesthood. This

is the Church's fundamental priesthood, which is served by the ordained priesthood (the subject of the spring 2011 issue of *C21 Resources*). Hence the central importance of baptism which makes us a part of the common priesthood.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church pointedly does not take a one-size-fits-all approach to the sacraments. Instead, it presents them in three groupings. The first is sacraments of initiation. This group includes baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. Note that this is the original sequence of Christian initiation, which has now been recovered in the rite of Christian initiation of adults. The questions raised by making confirmation into a sacrament of "Christian maturity" are raised later in this issue. Of course, the supreme sacrament is the culmination and high point of Christian initiation: the Holy Eucharist in which Christ gives himself to us in His body and blood. (The Eucharist was the subject of the fall 2011 issue of *C21 Resources*.) It's very helpful to understand Eucharist as the *ongoing sacrament of Christian initiation*, in which we are helped to become more and more what we receive—Christ.

The Catechism goes on to treat two sacraments that heal our baptismal status when it is broken or wounded. These are the sacraments of penance and of the anointing of the sick. The experience of both of these sacraments has been significantly transformed in the wake of the liturgical reforms that followed Vatican II. Confession of sin to a priest has become rarer but perhaps more significant. Anointing of the sick is no longer "extreme unction," the sacrament of the dying, but rather a sacrament that helps the seriously ill to encounter the healing power of Christ in the midst of his community. As our essays on these sacraments help to point out, we now understand these sacraments in the context of

pastoral care. In other words, they are ideally not so much discreet moments as they are high points of a process of Christian life.

The final two sacraments are called "sacraments at the service of communion." Holy orders and holy matrimony, each in its own way, help to build up the Christian community by incarnating God's service to us (holy orders) and God's love for the world (marriage). Each of these sacraments is realized more in being lived out than simply in the ceremonies that initiate them.

In the previous issue of *C21 Resources* I dealt with the Eucharist as a many-faceted jewel whose richness is inexhaustible. The same can be said, I think, of the seven sacraments of the Church, which like the Eucharist act as the summit toward which our Christian life flows and, at the very same time, the source of that life (Const. on the Church # 11). In other words, the sacraments realize (make real) the graced experiences of our daily lives and by ritualizing those experiences they nourish us with further grace in a kind of blessed circle to live our lives as members of Christ's Body, his common priesthood.

I hope that you will find the essays, poetry, prayers, and art in this issue an encouragement to appreciate ever more profoundly the rich sacramental life of God's people.

—

Endnotes

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Photo by Lee Pellegrini, Office of Marketing Communications, Boston College



GOD'S GRANDEUR

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

What Makes Us Catholic: The Sacramental Principle

THOMAS H. GROOME

Catholic Christianity emphasizes that the divine-human covenant is enacted within the everyday of life; here is where “it’s at” between ourselves and God. Here God outreaches and engages with us. *Here* we respond as responsive partners. Catholic tradition gathers up this conviction that our covenant is realized through the ordinary of life in the principle of sacramentality. Nothing is more significant to *what makes us Catholic* than the sacramental principle. It epitomizes a Catholic outlook on life in the world; if allowed only one word to describe Catholic imagination, we’d have to say *sacramental*.

Theologian Richard McBrien writes, “No theological principle or focus is more characteristic of Catholicism or more central to its identity than the principle of sacramentality.” Although that is surely true, Catholic Christians tend to associate sacramentality too exclusively with what happens in church, with the celebration of the seven sacraments. The principle of sacramentality, however, reaches far beyond liturgical rites. In fact, the great sacraments are simply climactic celebrations of the sacramentality of life.

The sacramental principle means that *God is present to humankind and we respond to God’s grace through the ordinary and everyday of life in the world*. In other words, God’s Spirit and humankind work together through nature and creation, through culture and society, through our minds and bodies, hearts and souls, through our labors and efforts, creativity and generativity, in the depth of our own being and in community with others, through the events and experiences that come our way, through what we are doing and

what is “going on” around us, through everything and anything of life. *Life in the world is sacramental*—the medium of God’s outreach and of human response.

St. Augustine defined a sacrament as “a visible sign of invisible grace.” The sacramental principle proposes that everything in our life/world can be such a sign. In the classic phrase of Ignatius of Loyola, Christians are invited “to see God in all things.” Christian faith also claims that God’s saving work in Jesus has heightened the sacramentality of life. Christians believe that Jesus was the primary sacrament of God to the world; empowered by the Spirit, Jesus was God’s saving presence as one of ourselves. What could be more “ordinary” than that? And the Spirit continues the sacramental effect of Jesus throughout human history.

Understood within the sacramentality of life in the world, the seven sacraments are sacred symbols that mediate God’s grace in Jesus with heightened effect. This they do by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Christian community. Each sacrament is a way of encountering the Risen Christ and of receiving the particular grace that the sacrament symbolizes, be that of initiating, empowering, sustaining, forgiving, healing, serving, or bonding. But Catholic Christians should never think of the seven sacraments as apart from life. All must be appreciated as apex 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 climactic moment in the divine-human partnership. As theologian Rosemary Haughton writes, “Sacraments are extraordinary experiences of the ordinary.”

Baptism symbolizes all human experiences of partnership and community, of belonging and vocation, as it initiates people into the Body of Christ—the Church—to live as disciples of Jesus toward the reign of God.

Confirmation symbolizes the human *spirit* of faith, hope, and love, and continues to initiate into Christian community by “sealing” Christians with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, strengthening them to live their faith in the world.

Eucharist symbolizes all that reflects vitality and responsibility, peace and justice, care and compassion—everything that fulfills the covenant—as it celebrates the real presence of the Risen Christ, makes “an offering of praise” to God, bonds Christians into community, sustains them with the “bread of life,” and empowers them “for the life of the world” (John 6:51). Eucharist is “the sacrament of sacraments” (Aquinas’s phrase) for Christian faith the most eminent instance of divine-human encounter.

Reconciliation symbolizes all human efforts at forgiveness, peacemaking, and clemency as it celebrates God’s never-ending mercy for repentant sinners, mediated through a Christian community.

Anointing of the sick symbolizes all human efforts at healing the ill, sustaining the elderly, and consoling the dying as it celebrates and mediates God’s power to restore people to health—spiritual, physical, and psychological—or to give hope for eternal life.

Holy orders symbolizes the vocation that everyone has to do worthwhile work, as it officially ordains a person to function as a leader in the Christian community's ministries of preaching, celebrating sacraments, and enabling the gifts of all to work well together with "holy order."

Matrimony symbolizes all experiences of friendship and support, all of human intimacy and sexuality, as it celebrates the covenant of life and love between a married couple.

In traditional Catholic theology, the effectiveness of a sacrament depends both on the action of the Spirit and on the response of the person

and community celebrating it—as always, a covenant. There is nothing magical about sacraments. True, they mediate God's grace but also bring the response-ability to live as graced people. For example, Eucharist enables people to encounter the real presence of the Risen Christ *and* it sends them to "love and serve" after the *way* of Jesus.

We must say likewise for the sacramentality of life in general. God's grace works through the ordinary and everyday but also expects our partnership and responsibility. Though enabled by God's Spirit, we must make our own good choices and best efforts.

In sum, Catholicism invites people to adopt a sacramental outlook on all of life in the world. In the words of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), "The world is charged with the grandeur of God! It will flame out, like shining from shook foil." That's a Catholic imagination.

—

Endnotes

THOMAS H. GROOME, is a professor of theology and religious education at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, where he also chairs the department of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry.

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The Blessing of a Latino/a Religious Worldview

NANCY PINEDA-MADRID

The popular religious practices of Latino/a Catholicism offer a valuable sacramental view of the world. "...Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

— (Mt 13:16)

Informed pastors and engaged parishioners have heard many times over that U.S. Catholic parishes are blessed by the active presence of diverse communities of Catholics. But, as many pastors know firsthand, bringing diverse communities together can be perilous work. Needless to say, language and cultural differences contribute significantly to the challenge. Misunderstandings and confusions abound. But, when thoughtfully done and with the help of God's grace, this work can lead to experiences of church that are both momentous and lasting.

While many ethnic and racial groups contribute to the diversity of the U.S. Catholic Church, more often than not Latinos make up the largest part of the mix. Catholicism is undergoing a significant shift. It is increasingly less a faith community made up of

peoples from predominantly European ancestry and more one made up of peoples of Latin American ancestry. Thus, the particular gifts borne by

Latino/a Catholics matter a great deal. Not only are these gifts transforming the Church of today but they also will play an increasingly significant role in



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revitalizing U.S. Catholicism in the coming decades. So, what do Latino Catholics have to contribute to parish life? How might a Latino/a religious worldview enrich U.S. Catholicism?

Sacramental Principle

Popular religious practices offer more than a strategy, more than a way of seeing God in our human struggles; they extend a tangible manifestation of, in Catholic parlance, the sacramental principle. The sacramental principle is a hallmark of the Catholic tradition. Throughout history Catholics have consistently held that God can and does manifest Godself through the material world in particular concrete ways. Popular religious practices extol the larger truth of the sacramental principle. When Latino/a Catholics create altars in their homes and decorate them with flowers, pictures of nature, symbols representing something they enjoy (e.g., a miniature guitar), as well as pictures of saints and deceased relatives, they are recognizing the concrete ways God becomes manifest through the material world.

As a manifestation of the sacramental principle, popular religious practices invite participants to be more keenly aware of the material world as God's creation. Over time this keen awareness

seeps deeply into our consciousness, developing in us a reverence for creation. Thus, we reshape who we are in the world. We are changed. We become increasingly attuned to what is authentically beautiful in this world. Authentic beauty wherever it exists reflects God's imprint. And it is this beauty that animates us to struggle for the good in our world, and to yearn for the truth in our lives.

The challenge for the U.S. Catholic Church is for all Catholics, irrespective of their ancestry, to recognize the blessing they bring to the Church and to honor and celebrate it.

Recognizing the Blessing

Popular Catholicism serves as a preeminent portal into the Latino/a religious worldview, which, while it thrives and flourishes, contributes mightily to U.S. Catholicism. A Latino/a worldview can transform our understanding of the Catholic tradition and engender, in the process, a more complete and richer portrait of this tradition. Latino/a Catholicism offers so much because of its distinctive historical trajectory.

The historical roots of Latino/a Catholicism vary significantly from those of Euroamerican Catholicism. The Catholic *faith* came to Latin America almost two generations before the Council of Trent, which means that its origins grew out of the medieval, Iberian Catholicism thriving in Spain in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. This pre-Tridentine Catholicism expressed its truths predominantly in symbols and rites,

and reflected an organic, cosmological, synthetic worldview. To a large degree Latino/a popular Catholicism traces its origins to this period. On the other hand, Euroamerican Catholicism finds its beginnings in the post-Tridentine world of Europe, where Catholic leaders fashioned a much more rationalistic and verbally precise faith in response to the challenges put forward by the Protestant reformers. Today, most U.S. parishes reflect an ethos informed by these beginnings, an ethos largely shaped by the culture of modernity. The Catholic tradition, in its fullness, contains both of these historical trajectories and the wisdom they each bear.

The challenge for the U.S. Catholic Church is for all Catholics, irrespective of their ancestry, to recognize the blessing they bring to the Church and to honor and celebrate it. If we can celebrate the religious practices that gave birth to our understanding of Catholicism, then we are better able to recognize the blessing that others bring. Even Latino/a Catholics must be challenged to take seriously and to honor their own religious birthright. Far too often Latino/a Catholics buy into the misjudgments made by Euroamerican Catholics who erroneously, and ignorantly, view popular Catholicism as a superstitious expression of faith. A Latino/a religious worldview is vital to the future of U.S. Catholicism—not because Latinos/as make up close to half of the current U.S. Catholic Church but because the integral, organic religious worldview intrinsic to Latino/a Catholicism offers a much needed critique to the hyper-individualism run amok in today's world. Indeed, Latino/a Catholicism is a much needed blessing for our time.

Endnotes

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Sacraments: The Road Back to Christ

DAVID FARINA TURNBLOOM

That Jesus Christ lies at the heart of the Catholic faith should not come as a surprise to any Christian. However, all too often, Roman Catholicism is viewed as (and, indeed, practiced as) a faith centered on a Church and not on Jesus. How, then, as Catholics, are we to return Jesus to the center of our faith? I suggest that the answer to this question may be the sacraments.

During a recent Holy Thursday liturgy, my father had a profound religious experience. During the washing of the feet, the pastor invited anyone who wished to wash someone's feet to come to the front. My mother turned to my father and said she would like to wash his feet. My mother has multiple sclerosis and has lost the use of her legs and arms. Nevertheless, my mother insisted and the two made their way to the front of the congregation. Through the help of fellow parishioners, my mother was able to take my father's feet and wash them as Jesus had done for his disciples.

When I asked my father what had been so moving about this experience, he told me that in that moment it was difficult for him to accept being served. As a father of three boys, a longtime employee of the Church, a health-care aid to my mother, and a devoted husband, my father was accustomed to experiencing God's love by giving rather than receiving. In this liturgical moment, he was initially quite uncomfortable. I compare my father's reaction to St. Peter who had to be convinced he should have his feet washed. In this moment my father went from being Martha to being Mary, from actively trying to serve Christ in others, to passively being loved by Christ through others. In washing her husband's feet, my mother became the presence of Christ's love. My father's reservations gradually gave way to tears, and those tears were shared by many of the parishioners. Sacraments, like this Holy Thursday liturgy, are rituals that bring Christ into the lives of our communities by helping us recognize ourselves as Christ. We may go through our daily lives knowing that Christ is in everyone we meet, but the sacraments offer us privileged ways to experience that presence.

The sacraments must be our path back to Jesus because they are the only path wide enough for us to walk as a community. There are certainly other wonderful and indispensable ways to cultivate a relationship with Jesus: for example, family prayer and personal reflection on the Scriptures help us grow closer to Christ. But these practices cannot replace the Church's liturgical celebrations. The seven sacraments are always *communal* celebrations. Our faith is catholic, not simply because it is offered to each and every human being, but because it is offered to us as a community and must be accepted as a community. Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* teaches us that God does not save us as individuals but as a body of faithful believers. Through the

sacraments, Jesus comes to us as a community. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them" (Mt 18:20). Our personal relationship with Jesus is never truly personal if others are not part of that relationship. It takes a community to gather around Christ.

The sacraments are where we continually grow as the Body of Christ. Living a virtuous, Christian life is hard enough as an individual. When we realize that as a community we are called to be Christ to the world, then the task of living a virtuous life becomes all the more daunting. Much of my spiritual life is made of activities like reading, writing, editing, and class discussions. The fact that so much of my time is taken up by these enriching but still individual activities helps me to see the critical importance of the sacraments. Through the communal celebration of the sacraments, my daily life of study is given purpose and new life; by participating in my local parish, I am reminded of why I study theology: to build up the Body of Christ.

The communal nature of the sacraments confronts me with the responsibility I have for others. Studying theology cannot be simply individual activity. As a member of Christ's Body, my actions are always the actions of that Body. What I write, what I read, and what I teach will affect the Body of Christ. Likewise, the more I participate in Christ's Body by celebrating the sacraments, the more my actions are formed by Christ. Every time we celebrate a sacrament, Christ offers Himself so that we might turn to Him and better follow Him. In every sacramental liturgy, we gather to hear the Word of God, so that we can hear our family story and learn who we truly are. Through the prayers and actions that make up our sacramental liturgies, we bring our past to life and let it form us into Christ. It is through the sacraments that we are able to become Jesus, because through the sacraments Jesus comes into the center of our lives.

I began by saying that the Catholic faith tends to replace Christ with the Church and her sacraments. I do not propose to prescribe the sacraments as a remedy. [This sentence is technically wrong. I *am* proposing that the sacraments are the remedy. Perhaps this: "My point is this: When we celebrate the sacraments they must point us toward Jesus."] There is a difference between making the sacraments the center of our faith, on the one hand, and making Jesus the center of our faith through the sacraments, on the other. The Catholic answer is that the sacraments are the most direct line to Jesus. The sacraments of the Church are where we most fully meet Christ and where we most fully become Christ. If we want to make Christ the center of our faith, then we must celebrate the sacraments.

Endnotes

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Pope Benedict XVI: From Homily on the “Feast of the Baptism of the Lord”

“The Baptism of Jesus, which we are commemorating today, fits into this logic of humility and solidarity: It is the action of the One who wanted to make himself one of us in everything and who truly joined the line of sinners; he, who knew no sin, let himself be treated as a sinner (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), to take upon his shoulders the burden of the sin of all humanity, including our own sin.”

He is the “servant” of Yahweh of whom the Prophet Isaiah spoke in the First Reading (cf. 42:1). His humility is dictated by the desire to establish full communion with humanity, by the desire to bring about true solidarity with man and with his human condition.

Jesus’ action anticipates the Cross, his acceptance of death for man’s sins. This act of abasement, by which Jesus wanted to comply totally with the loving plan of the Father and to conform himself with us, expresses the full harmony of will and intentions that exists between the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. For this act of love, the Spirit of God revealed himself and descended to alight upon Jesus as a dove, and at that moment the love which unites Jesus to the Father was witnessed to all who were present at the baptism by a voice from heaven that everyone heard.

The Father reveals openly to human beings, to us, the profound communion that binds him to the Son: The voice that resounds from on high testifies that Jesus is obedient to the Father in all things and that this obedience is an expression of the love that unites them to each other.

Therefore, the Father delights in Jesus, for He recognizes in the Son’s behavior the wish to obey His will in all things: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17). And these words of the Father also allude, in advance, to the victory of the resurrection and tell us how we must live in order to please the Father, by behaving like Jesus.

Dear parents, the baptism, that you are asking for your children today, inserts them into this exchange of reciprocal

love that is in God between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; through this act that I am about to carry out, God’s love is poured out upon them, showering them with his gifts. Your children, cleansed by the water, are inserted into the very life of Jesus who died on the Cross to free us from sin and in rising, conquered death.

Therefore, spiritually immersed in his death and resurrection they are set free from original sin and the life of grace is born within them, which is the very life of the Risen Jesus. He “gave himself for us,” St. Paul says, “to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14).

Dear friends, in giving us faith, the Lord has given us what is most precious in life, that is, the truest and most beautiful reason for living: It is through grace that we have believed in God, that we have known His love with which He wants to save us and to deliver us from evil. Faith is the great gift with which He also gives us eternal life, true life. Now, dear parents

and godparents, you are asking the Church to receive these children within her, to give them baptism; and you are making this request by virtue of the gift of faith that you yourselves, in turn, have received.



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Endnotes

Homily on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Pope Benedict XVI, January 9, 2011.

Full text and references can be accessed at the Vatican website at <http://www.vatican.va/>



Infant Baptism and Adult Faith

MICHAEL DRUMM

Baptism is a communal rather than an individual affair. No effort should be spared in doing away with any semblance of private baptism. It should never be a private family affair and if it is, then this should be changed. A gathering of two families from hither and thither does not constitute a gathering of the *ekklesia*. The underlying reason for the “privatization” of baptism is that it is perceived in the popular mind as essentially concerned with freeing the individual from original sin while often forgetting the other central effects of the sacrament: participation in the paschal mystery, entry into the community of the Church, and the giving of the Holy Spirit. By right, baptismal celebrations should take place during the key gathering of the local community at its Sunday Eucharist. This is not nearly so difficult as some priests suggest.

It is hardly surprising that our Sunday gatherings are so anonymous when we don’t even celebrate and acknowledge new members in our communities, something which most people would love to do. Of course, if a true communal emphasis is to be introduced then the present “supermarket” syndrome of shopping around for a suitable priest and/or church must be overcome. Nothing could be more indicative of a privatized notion of baptism, which people perceive as available on demand. Given the present model for celebrating the sacrament it is not surprising that priests who are family members or friends agree to act as celebrant even though this further corrodes the local community dynamic. Serious efforts must be made to overcome these gross misunderstandings of the sacrament that are common among our people (and priests?). There is no pastoral or theological reason why baptism should occur in any context other than a gathering of the local parish community. It is lamentable that in our present situation the blessing of throats occasions a greater gathering of the community than does baptism.

Faith

Baptism can take place only in the context of faith. The faith referred to in infant baptism is that of the parents. One could certainly argue that only the children of those who practice should be baptized; this would be a very strict criterion but it is definitely a coherent one. Alternatively, one might introduce a catechumenate for parents, admittedly a rather strange idea but strange situations call for strange remedies and nothing could be stranger than

baptizing the children of nonbelievers. The function of this catechumenate would be to enable parents to renew their own baptismal promises in a meaningful way so that they could sensibly promise to raise their child in the faith.

A more radical approach would actively discourage some baptisms if they only amounted to a formality undergone to satisfy cultural mores or “the mother-in-law.” One could also encourage those who sincerely doubt the sense of baptizing infants to postpone the celebration until a later time. To facilitate practices such as these it would be helpful to introduce a rite of welcome for such infants (along the lines of the rite of becoming catechumens in the RCIA) so as to emphasize that though not baptized they are linked to the community of the Church. The parish community must take responsibility for those they baptize. It is not satisfactory to

baptize and then hope that someone else will catechize. Much of our thought and energy must now be devoted to catechizing those we so readily sacramentalize.

Evangelization

To preach the good news of the death and resurrection of the Lord is the origin and goal of all sacraments, especially baptism. Lent and Easter emerged as liturgical seasons to prepare for and celebrate baptism. The baptismal liturgies of Lent make little sense to our people because Lent is seen as a time of very personal penitential renewal. Valid as abstaining from foods, cigarettes, and alcohol might be, it is hardly the most potent manner of reminding people of the paschal significance of their baptism. We need to retrieve Lent, Easter, and baptism from the clutches of an all-too-private piety that is precisely what the RCIA attempts to do. To give a proper focus to the paschal character of baptism, some suggest that we should baptize only at the Easter vigil. Again, it sounds extreme but it has strong roots. The least one must insist upon is that baptism should occur only on occasions of paschal significance, i.e., on Sundays. I can see no reason why it should not be limited to some Sundays of particular significance, obviously Easter and Pentecost, the other Sundays of the Easter season, Ascension and Corpus Christi, while Epiphany and the Baptism of Our Lord also suggest themselves as possibilities. Why tie baptism to certain Sundays and major feast days? That is the only way one



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The Missionary Nature of Confirmation

MARC B. CARON

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.” World Youth Day (WYD) 2008 participants will remember that passage from Acts 1:8 as the theme of the event in Sydney, Australia.

The theme evoked both the name that Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandez de Quiros gave to the continent in 1606—“the Southern Land of the Holy Spirit”—and the sacrament of confirmation.

During that World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed 24 young people (14 Australians and 10 from other continents) at a Mass in which 400,000 pilgrims participated. During the liturgy of the Eucharist, the relationship of confirmation and Eucharist was stressed as the pope distributed communion to the *confirmandi*.

Long before that communion rite at the Mass at Randwick Racecourse, World Youth Day participants were pointed to see the connection among the sacraments of initiation. Their several-kilometer walk the day before the Mass took them over the Sydney Harbor Bridge. As they journeyed on that iconic bridge, the texts in the pilgrim’s guide called attention to the new life that the sacrament of baptism brings. After recalling water’s role in the history of salvation, the text stated, “The water that flows beneath our feet recalls for us the gifts that we have received in baptism and which we renew today Lord we want to renew our baptismal promises and our rejection of sin, so that we may live in freedom as your children. Pour your Holy Spirit upon us, so that we may

receive the strength and courage we need to live according to the faith we profess” (World Youth Day Liturgy Day 2008, Liturgy Guide, p. 66).

From the start of World Youth Day 2008 on July 15, the *confirmandi*, along with all of the pilgrims, were being prepared for the celebration of the sacrament of confirmation during the closing Mass with Pope Benedict XVI and 400 other bishops.

As the pilgrims approached Randwick Racecourse the day before the closing Mass, they stopped at seven specially designated “power stations” along the way. Each of these stations corresponded to a gift of the Holy Spirit. Pilgrims reflected on each gift at each location. That evening, during the prayer vigil at which Pope Benedict XVI presided, seven young pilgrims offered their personal testimony about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Father responded with an address that touched upon St. Augustine’s teaching on the nature and action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the baptized. When the 24 candidates for confirmation were presented to the Holy Father, he prayed an originally composed text, invoking the Holy Spirit upon the candidates and on all gathered with him that night.

Sunday morning began with the celebration of morning prayer for the pilgrims with texts borrowed from the Liturgy of the Hours for Pentecost Sunday. Texts for Mass on

Sunday morning were taken from the ritual Masses for confirmation (Ritual Masses #4 A and B, Preface 54). The Scripture readings obviously evoked the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11), the diversity of gifts the Spirit provides (1 Corinthians 12:41-13), and Jesus’ mission to the world under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:16-22a). The rite of confirmation followed the usual order: call of the candidates, homily, renewal of baptismal promises, laying on hands, anointing with chrism, and general intercessions.

Overall, the celebration of confirmation during World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney was consistently placed in a missionary context. This missionary mandate from Christ is exactly what the pilgrims and the newly confirmed shared.

Theologians continue to point out that there are many ways to describe the effects of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of confirmation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) refers to confirmation completing baptismal grace, binding the baptized more perfectly to the Church, and enriching them with a special strength of the Holy Spirit (CCC, 1285). The increase and deepening of baptismal grace in confirmation roots us more firmly in our relationship with God the Father, unites us more closely to Christ, increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us, and perfects our bond with the Church (CCC, 1303). The *Catechism* goes on to state that confirmation “gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross” (CCC, 1303). This “power

to profess faith in Christ publicly” (CCC, 1305) has been most clearly associated with the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas on confirmation (ST III, 72, 5, ad 2). It is this latter point that the various celebrations of World Youth Day highlighted. This power to profess faith publicly was implicit in the theme for WYD Sydney 2008: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.” It is perhaps the aspect of confirmation that is most readily applicable to those baptized Roman Catholics, like the World

Youth Day pilgrims, who have already been receiving Communion for some years, and who now complete the grace of their baptism through the reception of the sacrament of confirmation. It is also the aspect of confirmation that organizers wanted all the pilgrims to take home with them. In a world much in need of the Good News of Christ, the young pilgrims of Sydney were reminded of their responsibility to transform the world more and more into the likeness of the kingdom of God.

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Endnotes

REV. MSGR. MARC B. CARON completed his seminary studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.. He served as one of the chancellors of the Roman Catholic iocese of Portland, and as director of the Department of Ministerial Services for the diocese. At the diocesan level, he is a member of the Presbytery Council, the College of Consultors, the Priests’ Personnel Board, and the Liturgical Commission.

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Confirmation: A Sacrament in Search of a Theology

OWEN F. CUMMINGS

It used to be said that confirmation was a sacrament in search of a theology. Indeed, it may still be said to some extent because despite advances made in the understanding of this eucharistic sacrament, its variegated practice throws up different models, not all of which overlap theologically. Fr. Paul Turner, a priest of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, an alumnus of Sant’ Anselmo in Rome, has devoted a great deal of time to the study of this sacrament and concludes that there are seven basic models of confirmation. Turner’s models are as follows: (1) The Christian Initiation of Adults model in which confirmation is consequent upon the celebration of baptism at the Easter Vigil; (2) chrismation, the Eastern version of confirmation, in which all who are baptized (including infants and children) are immediately chrismated, that is, anointed with *myron/chrism* afterwards; (3) confirmation as celebrated by many churches of the Reformation tradition and the Anglican Communion; (4) confirmation celebrated for those new Catholics who had been baptized previously in another church, and who are not being received at the Easter Vigil; (5) confirmation of children, baptized as infants, but confirmed at a later age; (6) adolescent confirmation, in which the teen years are judged to be the more appropriate time for the sacrament for those baptized as infants; and (7) those confirmed in danger of death through the use of an abbreviated rite. Turner concludes his initial laying out of the models with

these words: “Confirmation marks a glorious moment in the life of a Christian: the giving of the Holy Spirit. But the confusion surrounding the sacrament has created a situation that demands a decision worthy of Solomon. I pray for an ecclesial gift of wisdom.” This essay is not the answer to Fr. Turner’s prayer! Nor does it take up the running issues between catechists and liturgical theologians having to do with the appropriate age and stage of life. Rather, this essay posits that if the sacrament of confirmation is understood eucharistically, there is both less confusion and more light.

Confirmation as Eucharistic: The Rite

“The catechism’s account of the sacrament of confirmation opens with a resounding acclamation of the unity of the initiation rites of the *Catholica*—baptism, chrismation, and the Holy Eucharist.” This has not always been easy for Catholics to experience, even as they begin to recognize the integral unity of the rites of initiation. So, how should we *experience* these rites? Is there a *norma normans non normata*? There is in the Easter Vigil. If we accept that the Easter Vigil is the mother of all liturgy, the theological and liturgical paradigm from which the entire liturgical-sacramental life of a Christian is derived and to which it is related, then we ought logically to situate confirmation there. At the Easter Vigil, the sequence of liturgical rites is: the great Liturgy of the Word, then baptism, followed by confirmation,



terminating in Eucharist. The sequence appears to indicate unambiguously that the meaning of the sacrament of confirmation is to be understood between baptism and the Eucharist. It is the liturgical and sacramental event that takes place after being plunged into the trinitarian life of God in baptism, and before God's terminal self-donation in the Eucharist. I say "terminal" here because prior to the "last things," God cannot give us more than the Eucharist, his utter self-donation, "This is my body, this is my blood." In the broad Catholic tradition, it is impossible to speak of the sacrament of baptism without mentioning at the same time the sacrament of confirmation. Terminating in the Eucharist, baptism with confirmation constitutes the sacraments of initiation.

Confirmation as Eucharistic: The Meaning

If baptism-confirmation-Eucharist is the correct sequence of the rites, so that confirmation is seen as immediately eucharistic, what is its meaning? What is the theology of confirmation? This is how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* understands confirmation, as a ritual-sacramental moment in the process of initiation. The catechism goes on to make a foundational statement about the sacrament, followed by five comments, further specifying the content of this statement. Taken together these points enable a better understanding of confirmation as eucharistic. Let us take each one in turn.

In the broad Catholic tradition, it is impossible to speak of the sacrament of baptism without mentioning at the same time the sacrament of confirmation.

The foundational statement is this: Confirmation "brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace" (1303). "Grace" is simply our Western theological code word for the entire process of God's sanctifying us, God's drawing us into the reality of his own life. This process of divinization initiated in baptism is taken further in the moment of confirmation but, of course, it remains the process of divinization or sanctification.

The first comment: "It roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, 'Abba! Father!'" "Filiation" means being son or daughter. Confirmation increases and intensifies that relationship with the Trinity that makes us sons or daughters in the Son, before the Father, through

the Holy Spirit. Second, because our relationship within the Trinity is increased and intensified, confirmation necessarily "unites us more firmly to Christ" and, third, "increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us." These comments are particularly helpful because they so carefully balance the christological dimension of the sacrament, our unity to Christ, with the pneumatological dimension, the increase of the Spirit. Fourth, "it renders our bond with the church more perfect," and fifth, "it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ." These final comments are entirely consonant with the course of the Creed insofar as immediately after professing belief in the Holy Spirit, the life-giver, we go on to believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. In other words, the catechism affirms that there can be no increase in the gifts of the Spirit without, at the same time, a strengthening of our bond with the Church.

We may also say that what the catechism affirms of the sacrament of confirmation both in the foundational statement and the five comments applies *a fortiori* to the Eucharist, even more than to baptism. What begins in baptism is intensified in confirmation, is completed in the Eucharist. Eucharist brings the increase and deepening of baptismal grace, roots us most deeply in the divine filiation, increases the gifts of the Spirit, renders our bond with the Church most perfect (the Eucharist makes the Church, the eucharistic body makes the ecclesial body), and strengthens us for mission ("The Mass is ended. Go in the peace of Christ"). This is how Vatican II's "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests" puts it: Through the ministry of the priests "the faithful, already consecrated in baptism and confirmation, are fully Incorporated into the body of Christ by the reception of the Eucharist," to which the other sacraments are attached and "lead." Confirmation is indeed a eucharistic sacrament, both ritually and theologically.

Conclusion

If we were collectively to think of confirmation in these terms, as a eucharistic sacrament, the confusion and lack of clarity alluded to in Fr. Turner's seen models of confirmation would be reduced. If the Eucharist were seen as the *terminus* to which baptism and confirmation necessarily led, then as a Church we would move to posit the sacrament of confirmation between baptism and the Eucharist. However, we are not quite there yet, and Fr. Turner's prayer for ecclesial wisdom has not been answered. *Veni, Sancte Spiritus!*

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Endnotes

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Anointing as Pastoral-Sacramental Ministry to the Sick

BRUCE T. MORRILL, S.J.

The renewal of the anointing of the sick in the Catholic Church is an ongoing effort to rescue the sacrament from its own malaise as “extreme unction,” a medieval and post-Tridentine practiced theology that has proven quite virulent in its resistance to the reform prescribed by Vatican II. The postconciliar rite replaces the mechanistic view of anointing as cleansing the soul for immediate entry into the beatific vision (and, thus, the priest’s bedside arrival as a veritable declaration of death), with a symbolic meaning and purpose far more resonant with the faith revealed in the Gospel. That, however, redefines the sacrament as one of healing, the recognition that God is working through human symbolism as part of a larger sacramental reality of shared faith within a community of believers. Bracketing the isolated, condensed manner of anointing the sick in emergencies as an abbreviated rite necessitated “by the special circumstances of hospital ministry” (Pastoral Care of the Sick, no. 149), the reformed rite envisions the sacrament’s typical celebration as part of a larger process of pastoral care for the sick and elderly. The ways divine grace becomes real in pastoral practice of this sacrament comes through the uniqueness of each human story. I offer the following from my own pastoral work as an exemplary case for understanding the theology of this beautiful rite.

Since the year 2000 I have been occasionally serving Yup’ik Eskimo villages in the Hooper Bay region on the Bering Seacoast of Alaska, making the long trip from Boston either at Easter or Christmastime as my academic schedule allows. In the early 1980s, after finishing college, I had spent a year as a Jesuit volunteer in a village further north at the mouth of the Yukon River. Twenty years later I was surprised yet consoled to discern a call once again to be of pastoral service to those villages. I have made seven trips during this decade, most for about 10 days, although I spent seven weeks in one village in the summer of 2001. I have come to forge close ties with folks of all ages in that village of about 700. The settlement sits on a high spot of tundra, overlooking serpentine sloughs, whipped by Bering winds, the people practicing subsistence while constantly teetering on the edge of poverty, steeped in their native traditions yet caught between that primordial world and the relentlessly

encroaching culture of media-driven consumption. One of the enduring Yup’ik values, nevertheless, is reverence and care for elders. This story is about one such elder, an 80-year-old woman I shall call Mary.

My most recent trip to that particular village, for Holy Week and Easter, was my first extended stay there in a few years, having made only a one-night visit during Christmastime two years before. I had, however, kept in touch with a couple of leading figures in the parish, one of whom had apprised me of a number of deaths that had occurred over the past year. The day before Palm Sunday I landed in the village, word of my arrival circulated, and I celebrated Mass with about a dozen people in the early evening. Before starting I inquired about the families of those who had died, as well as the condition of certain elders, especially Mary. I already knew that two of the recently deceased were Mary’s brother and sister, but I was shocked to learn that another was one of her daughters, Sarah, a single parent in her forties who had succumbed to cancer. Yes, advised the leader of the parish’s eucharistic ministers, who faithfully bring Holy Communion to the homebound, Mary was still in her home and able to receive guests and, yes, she would especially benefit from a pastoral



Photo by Meghan Wenger, BC 2013 www.joyfulgiving.com

visit. After Mass I took a pyx containing a few Hosts and a copy of the *Pastoral Care of the Sick* and walked the short distance to Mary's house.

Typical of homes in the Yup'ik villages, four generations live under Mary's roof, a crowded, hard-worn, prefabricated structure with a kitchen and living area in the center and small pairs of bedrooms on each end. That evening I entered a scene of all ages in the common room: Mary's 50-something son Paul, a widower, preparing dinner with his daughter, the daughter's toddler playing around the floor, Paul's niece and another teenaged girl eating at the table, a brother watching television, and, finally, Mary, occupying a minuscule portion of the couch. She had clearly aged over the past couple years, shortened by osteoporosis (Paul later commented, "My Mom keeps shrinking!"), thinner, hearing and sight somewhat diminished, but still able to get around with a walker. I received greetings all around, but Mary did not recognize me at first (truth is, I had aged a fair amount over the past couple years, as well), so Paul showed her a five-year-old photo of me on the wall, which sparked the connection. She smiled and clasped my hand in a still forceful grip, repeatedly saying "thank you" in Yup'ik.

Like many of the elders, including her late husband, James, Mary had never learned English. Mary made her way to the table and, very much the matriarch, instructed her son and granddaughter to serve me supper. As we all ate together, with Paul translating between his mother and myself, our conversation slowly shifted to the heavy stories of recent deaths. The story of Mary's elder sister's death included some remarkable occurrences in weather that served as signs of consolation to the family, contrasting with the account of her daughter's succumbing to cancer, remaining quietly at home, no doubt in much pain, to the end. During the conversation the younger people had all gradually drifted into other rooms. As I noticed the grief written on Mary's face, Paul said his mother wanted to talk more about all this. Mary was pondering two things: How was she to pray during this coming Holy Week, and why was God keeping her on this earth, while her daughter, brother, sister, and (three years earlier) husband had all been taken, leaving her behind? I knew it was not a moment for abstract explanations but, rather, a story. I was profoundly grateful to have a good one to share with Mary.

I asked Mary to remember the time we had first met during my initial pastoral stay in the village six and a half years earlier. The Jesuit who serves the region, in explaining his routine for the daily evening Mass, noted that after Mass each night he regularly brought Communion to one elderly couple who used to attend faithfully but now were homebound. I accompanied him to James and Mary's home my first night there, and after he departed the next day for other villages, I made a point of doing so daily for the duration of my stay. Mary was frail (hobbled by an old, untreated foot and leg injury) but her mind was

sharp, while James, some 10 years her senior, lived with significant bodily and communicative debilitation due to a stroke. Their material poverty, the crowded quarters housing several generations, the elders' inability to speak English, the complete care the younger generations gave them (including as translators) none of these things surprised me much, given my year's stay in a similar village nearly two decades before. What did impress me deeply from that start, however, was the profound reverence, the palpable joy, the consoling humility with which this aged couple celebrated the service of Holy Communion. They had long ago memorized the English responses to the parts of the Mass, many of which function in the Communion service as well. After the brief reading from Scripture and my beginning the prayers of the faithful, Mary would offer in Yup'ik extended prayers of intercession, followed by the couple and as many family as had gathered round reciting the Lord's Prayer in their native language. I would then administer Holy Communion to the couple and Sarah, who was primarily caring for them, and perhaps some others, after which followed silent prayer, the blessing, and then a greeting of peace shared by every person in the house, regardless of whether they had joined in the service.

My primary pastoral role was simply to lead them prayerfully in the rite as found in the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, doing what the Church does, a shared practice of the tradition that both served the faith of the elderly Yup'ik couple and quickly bonded us all. I was present in a posture of service to the elders, but the enacted ritual worship was affecting the family and also transforming me. At the center of the ritual were Mary and James, whose faces and bodies proclaimed such quietly joyful faith in receiving and sharing the Body of Christ, a sacramental action I came to realize was integral to the life they shared with each other and the entire family. I began to look forward to visiting them each evening. Their home was a short distance from the church, made surprisingly long that year by relentless gale winds blowing horizontal sheets of snow and rain that glazed the surface of the terrain. With jolting gusts intermittently intensifying the headwinds, I repeatedly found myself temporarily immobilized, struggling to retain my balance on stretches of glare ice, even pushed backward at times. On successive evenings as I skidded, strained, or came to a complete halt alone in the darkness, the wind howling in my ears, I would find myself marveling: What in the world am I doing here? The answer became clear in the repetition: This is the life of the Gospel, and true to form, Christ is proving to be the one who has already gone ahead, awaiting to meet me amidst people profoundly aware of their need for God. That need—their poverty in spirit, their trust—was eliciting a desire within me to be with Christ—and thus them—that I could never have come up with on my own.

A couple of days before Christmas Paul called to say his mother wanted me to come for lunch with her, James, and

a couple of their other sons. I arrived in the brightness of noontime to find one of the daughters-in-law preparing the meal, with Mary advising. The event, I slowly came to realize, was not only an act of hospitality on the cusp of Christmas, but also a modeling of roles and practices from James and Mary to the generation succeeding them. At one point Paul recounted how his father, James, had patiently taught his sons through stories and the example of his own life. I decided to say something then to Mary and James, through Paul's translation, that had been building up in me: how over the past week they had become for me great teachers and examples of what it is to practice faith in the eucharistic Christ, how their celebration of Holy Communion challenged and inspired my faith. With tears in her eyes Mary replied that all her life, since her youth at the old regional mission school, she had always thought of the priests and sisters as the people she had to learn from. She never imagined she would hear one of them calling her his teacher. I just nodded and smiled.

That was the story, abridged and focused on the witness of her faith to me, that I told Mary in response to the directionless grief and loneliness she was now experiencing, years later, in the deep wake of her recent losses and the ebb tide of her own declining physical condition. I suggested that, while God's wisdom and timing are ultimately inscrutable, it seemed clear that Mary still had a role to play in this world, in her family, in the wider village and parish community who came to visit her or remembered her in their prayers. Mary's vocation, I told her, remains that of an elder to us, an example of practiced faith as an all-encompassing way of life, a source of encouragement and

consolation to many through her embodiment of a world of memories and present affection. Her eyes registering acceptance, Mary responded through a serene smile with a repeated thank you in Yup'ik.

After a quiet moment I noted how late the hour was and that we had not yet shared Holy Communion. Mary asked that I first celebrate with her the sacrament of penance, which we did in one of the back rooms, and then many of the family gathered around for the Communion service. In departing, I asked Paul how long it had been since Mary had received the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. He explained that she had twice been flown to the regional hospital for health crises during the past couple of years and most likely had been anointed at some point. I averred that the present seemed like a beneficial moment for her to celebrate the sacrament again, if she were to understand it not as last rites but an anointing to strengthen and support her in her weakened condition and new spiritual challenges. Paul immediately nodded that he knew what I meant, saying they had been catechized in the reformed theology and practice of the sacrament. Paul later conferred with Mary, and we looked forward to celebrating the sacrament of anointing with her at some point in Holy Week.

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Endnotes

BRUCE MORRILL, S.J., is the Edward A. Malloy Professor of Catholic Studies at Vanderbilt University. His books include *Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death* (Liturgical, 2009) and the forthcoming *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist: The Paschal Mystery in People, Word, and Sacrament* (Paulist, 2012).

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Infant Baptism and Adult Faith

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can seriously link evangelization with sacrament; the very act of explaining why it occurs only on certain occasions would be part of the process of evangelization.

People will raise many objections; it's not possible in terms of numbers; what of those who want their child baptized immediately? To the former my reply is that it is possible; a large number of parishes have less than 20 baptisms per year, some have as few as half a dozen, none has so many as rules out a proper communal, paschal-linked celebration. At any rate the numbers are going to become smaller and smaller. To the latter, my reply is that baptism is not an emergency rite except in an emergency. Nothing so distorts the practice of baptism than the *quam primum* idea that baptism is an emergency intervention to save the child from the wrath of God in case he/she dies; evangelization is surely required to liberate people from seriously deficient images of God, Church, and sacrament. Postponing baptism for a short period until an occasion

of key paschal significance arises provides just such an opportunity for evangelization.

If we want the sacraments to be moments of evangelization we must allow the symbols to speak, which means overcoming our terribly minimalist approach to water, oil, bread, touch, etc. The overflowing abundant waters of baptism are reduced to the barest few drops from a jug; oil is used but with great reserve in celebrating the most gracious self-giving we should surely be lavish in our expression.

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Endnotes

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C21 UPDATE

SPRING 2012

CATHOLICS: A SACRAMENTAL PEOPLE

FEBRUARY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2012

LECTURE

Catholics: Why We Are a Sacramental People **PRESENTER:** Fr. Michael Himes, professor, Theology Department **LOCATION/TIME:** Gasson Hall, Room 100, 4:30 p.m. **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, BC Theology Department, BC Alumni Association **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** March 1, 2012

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2012

LECTURE

Why Be Baptized in the Catholic Church? **PRESENTER:** John F. Baldwin, S.J., professor, School of Theology and Ministry **LOCATION/TIME:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m. **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, BC Theology Department, School of Theology and Ministry **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** March 10, 2012

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2012

LECTURE

Living the Sacrament of Confession **PRESENTER:** Paul Wilkes, author **LOCATION/TIME:** Gasson Hall, Room 100, 5:30 p.m. **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, BC Theology Department **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** March 15, 2012

MARCH

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2012

LECTURE

Why Confirmation Matters **PRESENTER:** Professor Liam Bergin, Visiting Scholar, Irish Studies **LOCATION/TIME:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m. **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, Irish Studies, BC Theology Department **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** March 26, 2012

FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 2012

LECTURE

Emerging Theologians Conference, celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council **KEYNOTE ADDRESS:** *Is Vatican II Still Relevant?* Dr. Massimo Faggioli, University of St. Thomas **LOCATION/TIME:** Gasson Hall, Room 100, 7:00 p.m. Keynote Address open to public. **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, BC Theology Department, School of Theology and Ministry **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** March 28, 2012

TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2012

LECTURE

A Catholic Funeral: Comfort for the Journey Forward **PRESENTER:** John Butler, S.J., vice president, University Mission and Ministry **LOCATION/TIME:** Hillside Café, Maloney Hall, 8:30 p.m. Agape Latte **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center and Campus Ministry **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** April 6, 2012

FRIDAY, MARCH 23, 2012

WORKSHOP

John's Gospel: Holy Week and Easter Themes **PRESENTERS:** Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., professor of New Testament, and Thomas D. Stegman, S.J., associate professor of New Testament, School of Theology and Ministry **LOCATION/TIME:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 1:00-4:00 p.m. FREE of charge. Early registration recommended at www.bc.edu/stmnce **SPONSORS:** The

School of Theology and Ministry and The C21 Center **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** April 15, 2012

APRIL

MONDAY, APRIL 23, 2012

LECTURE

Encounter Day for Hispanic Catholic Priests (in Spanish) Día de encuentro de sacerdotes hispanos sirviendo en Nueva Inglaterra **PONENTE:** Cardenal Jaime Lucas Ortega y Alamino, Arzobispo de San Cristobal de la Habana **LUGAR:** 9 Lake St., salon 035. Lunes 23 de abril, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. **SPONSORS:** Patrocinado por la Escuela de Teología y Ministerio de Boston College y The C21 Center. Este día no tiene costo alguno. Almuerzo incluido. Se recomienda inscribirse lo más pronto posible. www.bc.edu/stmnce.

THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2012

PANEL DISCUSSION

Women for Others, Leaders for the Church **MODERATOR:** Patricia De Leeuw, vice provost for faculties, Office of the Provost, will be joined by several Boston College alumnae panelists **LOCATION/TIME:** The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m. **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, Women's Resource Center, BC Alumni Association **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** May 16, 2012

MONDAY, APRIL 30, 2012

PANEL DISCUSSION

Why Get Married in the Catholic Church? **MODERATOR:** Fr. Tony Penna **PANEL:** Three married couples **LOCATION/TIME:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m. **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, Campus Ministry, BC Alumni Association **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** May 16, 2012

JUNE

SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 2012

WORKSHOP

A Contemplative Vision of the Mystics **PRESENTER:** Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I. **LOCATION/TIME:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost: \$45 donation, including lunch. FREE to Boston College students and faculty. Early registration recommended. To register, email Fran Ricciarelli at franricci749@gmail.com or call 781-749-4273 **SPONSORS:** The C21 Center, School of Theology and Ministry, Contemplative Outreach of Boston **WEBCAST AVAILABLE:** June 25, 2012

SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 2012

LECTURE

Annual Hispanic Ministry Renewal Day (in Spanish) Día de crecimiento espiritual para líderes hispanos de Boston y Nueva Inglaterra **PONENTE:** Pedro Rubalcava and Nancy Pineda-Madrid **LUGAR:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons. Sábado 23 de junio, 9:00 a.m. a 5:00 p.m. La Alabanza Eucarística en Clave Hispana: Música y Espiritualidad. Este día no tiene costo alguno. Inscribese en la página electrónica www.bc.edu/stmnce o llame al 617-552-0119. **CO-PATROCINADO:** por School of Theology and Ministry y The C21 Center

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Day of Reflection: Images of Hope for the Lenten Season **PRESENTERS:** Sr. Mary Sweeney, Campus Minister, and Fr. Michael Ford, S.J., Assistant Rector, St. Mary's Hall **LOCATION/TIME:** Alumni House, 825 Centre Street, Newton, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Morning refreshments included. **SPONSOR:** Boston College Alumni Association **REGISTER:** www.bc.edu/alumni/spirituality

WEDNESDAYS, MARCH 7, 14, 21, 28, 2012

Seminar Series *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Theology and Practice* **PRESENTER:** Msgr. James A. Mongelluzzo **LOCATION/TIME:** 9 Lake St., Room 130, Brighton Campus, 4:00–6:00 p.m. **SPONSORS:** The School of Theology and Ministry **REGISTER:** www.bc.edu/stmce

FRIDAY, APRIL 27, 2012

From Mental Illness to Spiritual Wisdom: A Father-Daughter Odyssey **PRESENTER:** Tom Zanzig and Barb Zanzig **LOCATION/TIME:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. **SPONSOR:** The School of Theology and Ministry, and generously supported by the Pyne Endowment Trust, in memory of Professor Margaret E. Pyne, a lifelong advocate for persons with disabilities. **REGISTER:** www.bc.edu/stmce

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A Changed Sacrament with Many Graces

BARBARA BECKWITH

Catholics have embraced Vatican II's emphasis on anointing of the sick as a sacrament for healing the sick and aged, as well as comforting the dying.

My mother had a stroke three and a half years ago and, somehow in all the confusion, received the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick four times in as many days. Now 87, she survived—her mind intact but the left side of her body frozen. She now lives in a nursing home. I asked her recently if she remembers being anointed. “Yes,” she said. “What do you remember?” “I lived.”

The sacrament of anointing of the sick used to be called “last rites” or “extreme unction” because the usual recipient was a dying person. Many Catholics still carry cards or wear medals so that, if they are in an accident, a priest is called to administer the sacrament.

But since the Second Vatican Council, the sacrament is not just for those in imminent danger of death, but for all Catholics whose “health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age” (Rite, #99). It’s usually not held simply with the priest and the person to be anointed, but is often celebrated in parish settings, homes, and nursing homes with family and friends in attendance. It’s now focused on trust in God—for whatever happens—and on healing—in whatever form that may take.

Three Parts to the Sacrament

The sacrament itself has three distinct parts: the prayer of faith, the laying-on of hands, and the anointing with oil.

In the prayer of faith, it is the whole community, the People of God, who pray for God’s help for the sick person. And if one member suffers, all share in those sufferings. This community aspect is why parishes now often hold communal celebrations of the sacrament. Sometimes it is combined with a Mass for healing. (There are also prayer services for healing that do not involve the sacrament.)

The laying-on of hands recalls Jesus’ manner of healing: “They brought the sick with various diseases to him and he laid hands on every one of them and healed them” (Luke

4:40). The gesture indicates that this particular person is the object of the Church’s prayer of faith. It is a sign of blessing and an invocation for the coming of the Spirit.

Anointing with oil signifies healing, strengthening, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. In biblical times, oil was used to massage athletes to fortify them for the race ahead. In the sacrament, the forehead and hands are anointed, and sometimes additional parts of the body, such as the area of pain or injury. (The pre-Vatican II ritual also used to anoint the feet, but that’s been omitted.)

After the disciples were first sent out by the Lord to continue his healing ministry, “They anointed many sick-people with oil and cured them” (Mark 6:13). The early Church continued this practice (Games 5:14-15). As the ritual for anointing outside of Mass says:

“My dear friends, we are gathered here in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who is present among us. As the gospels relate, the sick came to him for healing; moreover, he loves us so much that he died for our sake. Through the apostle James, he has commanded us: ‘Are there any who are sick among you? Let them send for the priests of the Church, and let the priests pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will

save the sick persons, and the Lord will raise them up; and if they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them” — (Rite, #117).

Jesus the Healer

Throughout the ritual there is an emphasis on Jesus the healer, the forgiver of sins and the source of all strength to accept and endure whatever comes. God is addressed as “God of all consolation.”

One of the readings that may be used is Matthew 11:25-30, which asks us to have childlike confidence in the goodness of God that will bring us the “rest” that only Jesus can give. The healing prayed for is “in body, in soul, and in spirit,” and for delivery “from every affliction.”

When the priest anoints a person’s forehead with blessed oil, he prays: “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.” When the hands are anointed, he says: “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.” Both of these call for an “Amen” response.



The most beautiful prayer from the ritual may be the one used after the anointing:

*“Father in heaven,
through this holy anointing
grant N. comfort in his/her suffering.
When he/she is afraid, give him/her courage,
when afflicted, give him/her patience,
when dejected, afford him/her hope,
and when alone, assure him/her the support of your holy
people” — (Rite, #125A).*

Some of the alternates are wonderful, too. For example, the prayer for advanced old age asks:

*“God of mercy,
look kindly on your servant
who has grown weak under the burden of years ...
Keep him/her firm in faith and serene in hope,
that he/she may give us all an example of patience
and joyfully witness to the power
of your love” — (Rite, #12SD).*

And the prayer for anointing a child is poignant:

*“Caress him/her, shelter him/her;
and keep him/her in your tender care”*

— (Rite, #12SF).

This is usually followed by the Our Father, that most perfect prayer of trust in God, in which all present join in. And the ritual’s concluding blessing asks the God who gives consolation and healing to “fill your heart with peace and lead you to eternal life” — (Rite, #130C).

Experiences of this Sacrament

Anointing Brought Me Peace

“I suffered a heart attack on December 11, 2008, and an operation placed two stents into my heart. Initially, my recovery went well but about 30 hours later, while in the ICU ward of Scott and White Hospital, Temple, Texas, I began to experience total cardiac arrest and received defibrillation shocks to revive me.

“After approximately seven of these episodes, over a four-hour time frame, I asked for a priest to visit me. In the presence of another chaplain and my wife, the priest anointed me and laid hands on me. I remember feeling relief and very content while I received the sacrament. My fears left me.

“Afterward, I went on to suffer four more cardiac arrest episodes/defibrillation shocks, and a second operation installed two additional stents into my heart.

“I quickly began recovery again the evening of December 12 and was discharged from the hospital on December 16. I am still recovering well as of this writing.

“I firmly believe that the peace and contentment I received during the anointing saved my life.”

— *Bill, Texas*

Lifted the Burden of Fear

“In 2006 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I went to our parish’s monthly healing Mass to receive the Sacrament of the Sick.

“I felt the burden fall from me as Fr. Drew was anointing me in my parish church. The sacrament helped me to face bravely the unknown. I still had to have the recommended surgery and follow it up with radiation, but I was able to pursue my physical healing with the burden of fear lifted from my shoulders. I am celebrating every day of being a cancer survivor!”

— *Name withheld, Texas*

What a Beautiful Consolation!

“Some years ago, my mother was admitted to the hospital with minor symptoms which could not be ignored because she was a diabetic. When I visited her two days later, worried nurses informed me she had suffered a severe stroke and was now in the intensive care unit (ICU).

“I stayed with my mother in the ICU and prayed fervently for her recovery. Late that afternoon, Fr. Anthony Moore, O.F.M., entered the room and gently told me that he was there to administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick to my mother. I don’t know if he was called by the caring nurses or if it was just his usual rounds, but I thanked God for his coming.

“My mother was unconscious, but Father anointed her and administered this beautiful sacrament. At its conclusion he made the Sign of the Cross and, to my amazement, my mother raised her right hand and made the Sign of the Cross with him.

“God called my mother home early the next morning. What a beautiful consolation it was to know that her last act was to participate in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick!”

— *Jeanne, New York*

A Care Coordinator Sees Love

“I have witnessed many occasions in which the sacrament of anointing of the sick resulted in a healing—not only a healing of the body, but also a healing of the mind.

“People are more at peace when they have had a blessing said over them with all their loved ones and family near. When you know you are going to die very soon, love will overtake the air you breathe and you can feel the love...and love is really the biggest healer of all.”

— *Kimberly, a hospice caregiver, California*

Endnotes

BARBARA BECKWITH is the managing editor of “*St. Anthony Messenger*” magazine. A graduate of Marquette University’s College of Journalism, she is a former president of the Catholic Press Association of the United States and former vice president of the International Catholic Union of the Press.

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Why Go to Confession?

JOHN BALDOVIN, S.J.

Many older Catholics can remember the Saturday afternoons of their youth being partially taken up by the practice of weekly confession. Although it was never put in writing, there was a kind of unwritten rule that if you wanted to go to Holy Communion on Sunday, you needed to go to confession on Saturday. Of course, the timing minimized the likelihood that you would sin seriously before the next morning. Remember, these were the days when the weekly Mass of obligation had to be celebrated on Sunday before noon. The Saturday afternoon timing might also have favored those who ate meat on Friday. (Why was it so tempting in those days to eat meat on Friday?)

Today, of course, the situation is much changed. There are no long lines at several confessionals in the church on Saturdays. (I recall that depending on what you had to confess choosing between monsignor and the two curates took some discernment—in those days all the priests would be on confession duty on a Saturday afternoon.) My usual experience as a priest helping in suburban parishes is that perhaps two or three people might come to confess in an hour and a half period. The numbers increase when a parish has a communal penance service (that is, what's normally called Rite 2 with a communal service and individual confessions), often calling on outside priests to help. Mostly this seems to happen twice a year—in Advent and in Lent. And even then, at least in my experience, the churches are hardly full of penitents.

Many complain that the sacrament has fallen onto hard times and lament its imminent demise. Perhaps a little historical perspective might be helpful. For the Church's first thousand years penance was an extremely serious affair and could be undertaken only once in a lifetime. As a matter of fact, for the first few centuries it wasn't all that clear that anyone who fell into serious sin (usually murder, adultery, or apostasy) could be forgiven their sin. Small wonder that a number of people (some of them famous like the Emperor Constantine who had after all killed off one wife and two sons) hedged their bets and put off baptism until their deathbeds. One could avoid a lifetime as a penitent by entering a monastery but then again St. Benedict said that the whole of a monk's life was a Lent! Gradually the public penitential practice was eased and people began adopting the practice of more frequent confession even for less serious sins. Up to the 12th century it seems that people could go to spiritual advisors, some of whom were not priests. By the 13th century the present requirement of an annual confession of serious sins to one's parish priest was in place together with the requirement of receiving

Holy Communion during Eastertide.

Even today one is required only to confess one's serious (or mortal) sins as completely as one can (see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). I think it's fair to say that what's happened in the last 40 years or so is that people's perception of serious sin has changed quite a bit. No doubt the disappearance of eating meat on Friday as well as disagreement over people's culpability in sexual matters like artificial contraception have had a great deal to do with the change in perception of what constitutes a mortal sin. It's not too much of a stretch to argue that hell has been greatly depopulated over the past 40 years or so.

Now the emphasis on the positive aspects of our Christian faith is very good news indeed. People are much more accustomed nowadays to pay more attention to God's love, mercy, and compassion than to their sins. They recognize, too (if they have been well catechized) that in order to commit a serious sin three things are required: serious matter, knowledge by the person, a freedom. I suspect it is true that people who are honestly striving to lead good Christian lives do not commit serious sins very often.

What's the problem then? Why do some lament the apparent disappearance of frequent confession? Why go to confession at all, especially if one is not conscious of serious sin? I think there are at least three answers to those questions.

The first is that we human beings have a great propensity for self-deception. Some people, of course, have the opposite problem and scrutinize their motives endlessly (sometimes to the point of an unhealthy scrupulosity), but I think that the vast majority of us are not terribly vigilant about our wrongdoing. And even when we do recognize our wrongdoing and admit it before God, we run the risk of under- or overestimating it. There is something very honest and human about our admitting our sins before another human being, who stands as a very tangible representative of God and the Church. It is from this ordained priest that we can hear the declaration of God's pardon in a way that no one else can. Moreover, because of the solemn seal of the confessional, this is literally the safest place on earth. I am quite sure that God does forgive our sins when we confess them honestly to Him, but the genius of sacramentality is that things like forgiveness, healing, God's self-gift all become very real for us in their being ritualized by human beings and (in the case of the other sacraments) the material goods of the earth.

The second reason for going to confession is the development of a good habit. I remember a conversation with an undergraduate a number of years ago. I think he was



a sophomore in college. He was asking about confession because he was unfamiliar with it. A Catholic, he had gone to confession only once in his life—before his first Holy Communion at the age of eight! Presumably the situation was not dire—that is, if he had committed no serious sin—but at the same time he was missing out on a valuable opportunity to take stock of his life before the Lord. It is essential for our growth in holiness that we regularly take time for a completely honest examination of conscience. It

seems to me that today people who are involved in 12-step programs have a much better sense of this than the broader Catholic population. Significant events do have a big impact on our lives, but so do ordinary repetitive patterns.

The last of the (many possible) reasons I want to articulate for going to confession is the fact that regular confession helps us to recognize the extent of God's grace in our lives. I frequently say to penitents: "You may think this sacrament is about how bad you are, but in reality it's about how good God is." It's difficult sometimes to realize that sin is only sin when we see it in the context of God's mercy. Otherwise, our misdeeds are merely wrongdoing. When we can see our wrongdoing as an offense against the God of love, we get a gut sense of what the 18th-century clergyman and poet, John Newton, meant when he wrote: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." The tangible, sacramental act of penance and Reconciliation actually saves us from the wretchedness of our misdeeds. The indispensable admission ticket to Christianity is gratitude to the God who forgives us our sins so that we can live the life He wants for us.

As we've seen here the sacrament of penance has taken a number of different forms over the centuries. How it will develop in the future is anyone's guess, but I am convinced it still has great value today—for anyone who needs to hear with regularity the spoken word of God's forgiving love and I think that means anyone who wants to be called a Christian.

Endnotes

JOHN F. BALDOVIN, S.J., is professor of historical and liturgical theology at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry. He is the guest editor of this issue of *C21 Resources*.

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How Do You Go to Confession?

KURT STASIAK, O.S.B.

It used to be that Catholics learned how to go to confession with their mother's milk. What to say, how to say it—and, of course, what didn't happen if you didn't say it—learning about these things was simply part of growing up Catholic.

Today, though, there are many who aren't quite sure what the sacrament of reconciliation (or penance or confession) is all about, much less how to go about celebrating it. Father John Baldwin has offered some insights on why it is important to go to confession. Here I'll try to clear up

some of the confusion some have about how one actually goes about celebrating this sacrament of God's mercy.

An important first point: there is no one, precise, "exactly right" way to go to confession. God's offer of forgiveness won't grind to a halt if you're confused about what to do next

or you forget the words of a certain prayer. The priest is not a referee, scrupulously vigilant that you stay "in bounds" and follow all the rules of the confessional. He is there to help you celebrate the sacrament as honestly, peacefully, and prayerfully as you can. Be reassured: your confessor does not

expect or demand perfection—either in your life, nor in the way you confess.

Let us begin. As you enter the confessional (or reconciliation chapel), it is your choice to confess face-to-face or “behind the screen.” In either instance, the priest may offer a greeting such as “Peace be with you,” or he may recite a brief passage from the Bible. Some priests may simply wait for you to begin. (Again, there is no one way to celebrate the sacrament.) After the greeting or reading, or if it seems the priest wants you to take the lead, make the sign of the cross and then say how long it has been since your last confession. (If you can’t remember exactly when that was, tell the priest that or make an educated guess.)

Who are you? The priest doesn’t need to know your name, but it can be helpful if he has at least a general idea of who you are and what you do. For example . . .

Father, it’s been six weeks or so since I last came to confession. I’m in my thirties, am married, and have two kids.

It’s been about three months. I’m a sophomore in college.

I’m in my twenties, Father. My last confession was just before Christmas. I’m getting married soon, and my fiancée and I want to start things off right.

These brief comments don’t relate your life history, of course, but they do provide the priest with a context that may help him better understand your confession.

What to confess? Many prayer books offer various forms of an examination of conscience. No matter which particular form you choose, as you examine your conscience—ideally a few hours, or even a day or two before your confession—the basic questions are, “What are my responsibilities (as spouse, parent, child, employer, worker friend, etc.), and how am I, or am I not living out those responsibilities?”

Our Church requires us to confess any mortal (grave or serious) sins we have committed, as well as revealing

how often we have fallen. The point here is not that the priest is keeping score (he isn’t), but the better idea your confessor has as to how often you struggle with your sins, the better position he is in to offer you counsel or advice.

While we aren’t required to confess venial (ordinary, “daily”) sins, it is often worth our while to do so. Bringing these ordinary faults and weaknesses to the sacrament helps us work on our conversion and grow in God’s grace a little more each day.

How to confess? Sins don’t have to be confessed in any particular order or in any particular way. Here is an example of how two men, each in his forties, each married with children, confess what are essentially the same sins but in a manner unique to each:

Peter: I sinned against the third commandment [“You shall keep holy the Lord’s Day”] once. I used the Lord’s name in vain probably several times a week. I committed some sins in thought against the ninth commandment [“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife”] a few times. I did tell a couple of lies, mostly harmless. I committed a venial sin against the fifth commandment [“You shall not kill”] when I drank a little too

much at a party. For these and all the sins of my past life, I am truly sorry.

Paul: Father, the thing that bothers me the most is that I just don’t always give my kids the kind of example I want to give them. My language isn’t always the best. I know that they know I fudge a little on the truth, sometimes. Two things, in particular. I came home from a party last Saturday just a little bit woozy. Had a little too much to drink. Two of my kids saw that, I wish they hadn’t. I made it even worse the next day, because I was really wiped out and just didn’t bother to get up for Sunday Mass. Also, although they don’t know this of course, I still have impure thoughts and desires at times. Most of all, I’d just like to be a better dad to my children. I think that is all, Father. I ask for your forgiveness.

Notice that the sins Peter and Paul confess are pretty much the same. *How* they confess those sins, however, differs. Peter follows a traditional examination of conscience based upon the 10 commandments. Paul uses his desire to be a good father as a kind of reference point from which to focus his



Alfredo Duggi Cohn / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY

confession. Are both confessions good? Yes. Are both confessions “right”? Yes. Both Peter and Paul have confessed in a satisfactory and appropriate way. The point of this example is not to assign a “higher grade” to one confession, but rather to illustrate the different ways in which sins can be confessed.

After you have confessed, the priest may offer you some words of advice or encouragement. Sometimes people are concerned about the questions the priest might ask. Be assured that if the priest does ask a question, it is because he believes he needs to know something more about what you have said in order to minister more effectively and more directly to you. And certainly you may ask the priest any questions you have, either to better understand something he has said or to ask about something that concerns you. The priest will then give you a penance, and ask you to make an act of contrition.

Act of Contrition and Absolution. Your act of contrition may be in your own words or you may take it from a book. It can be as succinct as, “Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” or it may take a longer form, such as the following:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to

do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

The priest will now say the words of absolution—the prayerful assurance that God, who welcomes the repentant sinner, forgives your sins. It is interesting to note that, before the Second Vatican Council, the priest would say the words of absolution in Latin while the penitent was making his or her act of contrition. The words of absolution are now said in English and they follow your act of contrition, so you can hear these words of mercy and peace!

Let us conclude. After pronouncing absolution, the priest will say something along the lines of “Go in peace” or “God bless you.” You may respond with “Thanks be to God” or even a simple “Thank you, Father.” This concludes the *celebration* of the sacrament, but of course there is still something to be done: your “penance.”

If the priest has given you prayers as your penance, you may say those

before you leave the church or at a better, more appropriate, time. And, whether your act of penance is prayers that can be said right away or actions to be performed later, it is good to spend at least a few moments in church thinking about what you have just done—and about what God has done for you. Forgiveness, pardon, peace. Good reasons to linger in the church for a while and give God thanks!

To conclude: the sacrament of reconciliation is meant to ease our burdens, not increase them. The confessional is a place where we sacramentally encounter God’s mercy, not a stage upon which memorized lines must be recited perfectly. There is no one exactly perfect way to go to confession. After all, the sacrament is a gift precisely for people who are imperfect! And remember that the priest is there as a helper and guide. He is there, as the *Catechism* says, “not [as] the master of God’s forgiveness, but [as] its servant.”

Endnotes

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Liturgies of Reconciliation

BERNARD J. COOKE

It is difficult to think of anything in Catholic life that has changed more rapidly and more drastically in recent years than the sacrament of reconciliation.

Just a few years ago, it was a common scene on a Saturday afternoon and evening to have numbers of people coming to the church to go to confession, and these numbers were greatly increased just before key religious holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. Hearing confessions was

one of the principal activities of parish pastors, and not infrequently there was need to bring in an extra priest to help with these confessions.

Today, one recalls this as something out of an almost-forgotten past. Saturday afternoons and evenings are now relatively quiet times around

most parishes. The parish billboard lists an hour when the pastor will be available for confessions, but scarcely anyone comes. Large numbers of people who previously would have gone to confession at least twice a month now go once or twice a year, if that often. On the other hand, when there are well-planned parish liturgies of reconciliation, they are often well attended, particularly by young people.

This change has happened very rapidly, with no obvious causes. No

one is quite certain what is happening, except that something new is coming into existence. Already, official modifications of the penitential rite have, in some local areas, led to changing the title from sacrament of penance to sacrament of reconciliation (although the Vatican's title is still the former), have introduced a more personal mode of confession that emphasizes the spiritual counseling aspects of the relationship between confessor and penitent, and have moved in the direction of community celebrations of reconciliation, even toward general absolution. This new ritual, with its multiple suggestions for celebrating reconciliation, recognizes that liturgies in this area must be flexible and must take account of people's actual needs, because different people are at much different stages. Perhaps the most profitable thing we can do in this situation is to clarify, as far as we can, the goals that effective reconciliation liturgies should seek. If we can do this, we will have some criteria for creating suitable liturgy.

Liturgy as Part of the Sacrament

1. Liturgies of reconciliation must be seen as only one element in the sacrament of reconciliation; they must be situated in the broader context of the actual human reconciliation going on within a Christian community. The reconciliation of Christian to Christian, of group to group within the community, and the community's ministry of healing the various alienations that splinter human society—these are what sacramentalize the reconciliation of humans with God. A liturgy that is not grounded in and giving expression to such actual reconciling is without meaning and therefore sacramentally ineffective.

This is by no means to suggest that liturgies of reconciliation are incidental or unnecessary; their role in the process of reconciliation shares in the indispensable role that language plays in human relationships. We humans

need to tell one another of our wish to be reconciled; we need to say that we are once more united in friendship; we need to voice our happiness in being no longer estranged. A reconciliation liturgy should accomplish all this.

2. Each Christian needs to admit, as part of a mature, realistic approach to life, that he or she has failed somewhat in living out Christian faith. One has not been a completely faithful disciple of the risen Lord; one has not been, to that extent, completely faithful in bearing witness to one's fellow Christians; one has betrayed the trust that Christians owe one another. To say this to one another, even specifying, when appropriate, the particular form of infidelity, is part of each one of us coming to greater self-knowledge. It is also an important bond that links us to one another; there is nothing we more universally share than the need to be forgiven.

One important advantage that comes with such open admission of our human infidelity is the correcting of our basic notion of sin. We come to understand sin as violation of persons, as infidelity to ourselves and to one another. We begin to experience our sinfulness as undesirable alienation rather than as oppressive anxiety or failure to comply with laws. We cannot turn away from and be healed of our sin unless we know what this sin really is. When, during a liturgy of reconciliation, the proclamation and explanation of the Gospel challenges our infidelities we can come to know better and admit to ourselves the real needs we have for conversion.

3. Liturgies of reconciliation should foster Christian formation of conscience. Even if our general notion of sin becomes more accurate, as personal infidelity, we still need to develop the ability to appraise actual situations of moral choice and decide which courses of action would be authentically Christian and which would be unfaithful. Another way of expressing this is to say that we need to form a genuinely Christian conscience, something we must do as individuals

but drawing from the shared moral wisdom of the Christian community. Community liturgies of reconciliation should provide important occasions for people to reflect prayerfully on the real decisions they face. They should be a major instrument for the formation of Christian conscience.

Celebrating Reconciliation

Like other sacramental ceremonies, the liturgy of reconciliation is meant to be a celebration, and be experienced as celebration. This clearly takes the focus off sin and healthfully places it on reconciliation. Obviously, no one would be celebrating human sinfulness, which only a truly malicious person would do, but reconciliation is truly something to celebrate.

Even if reconciliation dealt only with the relationships of Christians one to another, or with individuals' reconciliation with themselves, it would be something for people to treasure and rejoice in together. How many humans can assure themselves that they will receive understanding and support from a genuinely compassionate community? But what Christians celebrate in addition is the personal loving forgiveness of a compassionate God. And what assures them of divine forgiveness is the human reconciliation they are experiencing, for that reconciliation is sacrament.

There are any number of situations in which liturgies of reconciliation can occur. Often they can be quite short, even informal: before a family meal, among a group of friends, as an element in other liturgies such as anointing or Eucharist. They can also be appropriate after some negotiations, to help heal wounds after some particularly aggressive competition in business, or in professional or public life, to welcome a person back into a group he or she had defected from because of some misunderstanding or conflict. It is important to keep in mind that Eucharist is and always has been the principal liturgy of reconciliation.

Corporate Repentance

Part of our growth in understanding sin has been the increased awareness of corporate guilt. As we saw in the last chapter, there are many sinful actions we do as *groups*. As groups we oppress other groups, undertake unjust wars and destroy other people's lives, refuse to shoulder the responsibilities that are really ours. As groups we are in certain respects "in a state of sin." Nations can exist arrogantly, and even glory in their arrogance and presumed superiority. Christian churches have lived with pious hatred of one another and refused to believe anything good of the others.

To reiterate a point made before, any discussion of liturgical ceremonies of reconciliation should include the fact that Eucharist is preeminently the liturgy of reconciliation precisely because in unique fashion it is the sharing of Christ himself, the ultimate source of reconciliation. In Paul's words, "He is our peace." It is not accidental that "peace" is a recurrent theme in eucharistic liturgy, nor accidental that the liturgy draws attention to the distinctiveness of the peace in question. It is "the peace of Christ," the reconciliation of persons to one another that comes when Christians recommit themselves to the

new covenant. It is that peace "which the world cannot give," because it flows from the life-giving and unifying power of the Spirit.

Eucharist makes clear that reconciliation within a Christian community is most deeply a matter of that group becoming truly the "body of Christ." What most awakens Christians to their infidelities and motivates them to love one another with greater fidelity is their relationship as individuals and as a group to the risen Lord. Christians' faith and discipleship go hand in hand with their acceptance of one another. In Eucharist, Christians share the bread made body of Christ as the sacrament of their being reconciled to one another in a truly compassionate community of persons.

Summary

In the rapidly changing context of the sacrament of reconciliation, it is difficult to determine exactly what shape or shapes the liturgy should take in this sacramental area. For one thing, the liturgical celebration is but one element in a much broader sacramental reality, namely, the actual reconciling that goes on in human life and especially in the Christian community. At least for the moment we can describe some of the needs that

reconciliation liturgies should meet if they are to be sacramentally effective.

There should be a liturgical situation in which Christians can publicly declare their infidelity to one another and, more importantly, their determination to live more faithfully and more lovingly. This must, of course, be coupled with a declared willingness on everyone's part to forgive those who have injured them. At the same time, there are corporate elements of sinfulness that Christian groups need to discover and disown together: divisions, animosities, and prejudices within a community, or shared neglect of Christian responsibility for the needs of the world.

Reconciliation liturgies should develop within the community an authentic sense of human sinfulness and the need of salvation, a peaceful awareness of a shared need for forgiveness, a hope in God's compassion, and a concerned support for people as they struggle to overcome evil.

Endnotes

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The Sacrament of Marriage

MICHAEL LAWLER AND WILLIAM ROBERTS

In the Bible there is an action called a prophetic symbol. Jeremiah, for instance, buys a potter's earthen flask, dashes it to the ground before a startled crowd, and proclaims the meaning of his action.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: so will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel" (19:11). Ezekiel takes a brick, draws a city on it, builds siege works around the city, and lays siege to it. This city, he explains, is "even Jerusalem" (4:1) and his action "a sign for the house of Israel" (4:3). He takes a sword, shaves his hair with it, and divides the hair into three bundles. One bundle he burns, another he scatters to the wind, a third he carries around Jerusalem shredding into even smaller

pieces, explaining his action in the proclamation: "This is Jerusalem" (5:5).

Self-understanding in Israel was rooted in the great covenant between the god Yahweh and the people Israel. It is easy to predict that Israelites, prone to prophetic action, would search for such an action to symbolize their covenant relationship with Yahweh. It is just as easy, perhaps, to predict that the symbol they would choose is the covenant that is marriage between a man and a woman.

The prophet Hosea was the first to speak of marriage as prophetic symbol of the covenant.

On a superficial level, the marriage of Hosea and his wife Gomer is like many another marriage. But on a level beyond the superficial, Hosea interpreted it as a prophetic symbol, proclaiming, making humanly explicit, and celebrating in representation the covenant communion between Yahweh and Israel. As Gomer left Hosea for other lovers, so, too, did Israel leave Yahweh for other gods. As Hosea waits in faithfulness for Gomer's return, as he receives her back without recrimination, so, too, does Yahweh wait for and take back Israel. Hosea's human action and reaction is prophetic symbol of Yahweh's divine action and reaction. In both covenants, the human and the divine, the covenant relationship has been violated, and Hosea's actions both mirror and reflect Yahweh's. In symbolic representation they proclaim, reveal, and celebrate not only Hosea's faithfulness to Gomer but also Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel.

The meanings of this marriage parable, of course, are not limited to meanings for the spouses; there are also meanings for their marriage. One such meaning is this. Not only is marriage a human institution; it is also a religious, prophetic symbol, proclaiming, revealing, and celebrating in the human world the communion between God and God's people. Not only is marriage a reality of social law, it is also a reality of grace. Lived into as grace, lived into in faith as we might say today, marriage appears as a two-tiered reality. On one tier, it bespeaks the mutual covenanted love of this man and this woman, of Hosea and Gomer, of Will and Willma; on another it prophetically symbolizes the mutually covenanted love of God and God's people. This two-tiered view of marriage became the Christian view, articulated later in the Letter to the Ephesians (5:21-33). Jewish prophetic symbol became in history Christian sacrament.

The classical Roman Catholic definition of sacrament, "an outward sign of inward grace instituted by Christ," which took a thousand years to become established, can now be more fully explicated. A sacrament is prophetic symbol in and through which the Church, the Body of Christ, proclaims, reveals, and celebrates in representation that presence and action of God that is called grace. To say that a marriage between Christians is a sacrament is to say, then, that it is a prophetic symbol, a two-tiered reality. On one tier, it proclaims, reveals, and celebrates the intimate communion of life and love between a man and a woman, between our Will and Willma. On another, more profound tier, it proclaims, makes explicit, and celebrates the intimate communion of life and love and grace between God and God's people and between Christ and Christ's people, the Church.

A couple entering any marriage say to one another, before the society in which they live, "I love you and I give myself to and for you." A Christian couple entering a specifically sacramental marriage say that, too, but they also say more. They say, "I love you as Christ loves his Church, steadfastly and faithfully." From the first, therefore, a Christian marriage is intentionally more than just the communion for

the whole of life of this man and this woman. It is more than just human covenant; it is also religious covenant. It is more than law and obligations and rights; it is also grace. From the first, God and God's Christ are present as third partners in it, modeling it, gracing it, and guaranteeing it. This presence of grace in its most ancient and solemn Christian sense, namely, the presence of the gracious God, is not something extrinsic to Christian marriage. It is something essential to it, something without which it would not be Christian marriage at all. Christian, sacramental marriage certainly proclaims the love of Will and Willma. It also proclaims, reveals, and celebrates the love of their God for God's people and of their Christ for his Church. It is in this sense that it is a sacrament, a prophetic symbol, both a sign and an instrument, of the explicit and gracious presence of Christ and of the God he reveals.

In every symbol there are, to repeat, two levels of meaning. There is a foundational level and, built on this foundation and bound to it, a symbolic level. The foundational level in a sacramental marriage is the loving communion for the whole of life between a man and a woman who are disciples of Christ and members of His Church. The symbolic or sacramental level is the representation in their communion of the communion of life and love between Christ and His Church. This two-tiered and bound meaningfulness is what is meant by the claim that marriage between Christians is a sacrament. In a truly Christian marriage, which is a marriage between two believing Christians, the symbolic meaning takes precedence over the foundational meaning, in the sense that the steadfast love of God and of Christ is explicitly present as the model for the love of the spouses. In and through their love, God and God's Christ are present in a Christian marriage, gracing the spouses with their presence and providing for them models of steadfast love.

There is one, final question for this essay. When the Catholic Church claims that *marriage* between baptized Christians is a sacrament, what precisely is the meaning of the word *marriage*? In ordinary language, the word is ambiguous. Sometimes it refers to the wedding ceremony, in which Will and Willma freely commit to one another "for the purpose of establishing a marriage" (Can. 1057, 2). Sometimes it means, more crucially, the marriage and the life that flows from their wedding commitment, the communion of life and love that lasts until death. Both these common meanings of the word *marriage* are intended in the claim that marriage is a sacrament.

Summary

This essay was about four interrelated personal realities: friendship, love, marriage, and the sacrament of marriage. I supported Aristotle's ancient claim that human life is impossible without friends, trusted others who understand and accept me as I am, who challenge my potential, and who rejoice with me when I attain it and console me when I don't. Friends wish me well, that is they love me, and I love them. We share our thoughts, our feelings, our dreams

and, on occasion, because we wish like Will and Willma to be best friends for life, we marry. I argued that marriage is an intimate partnership of love for the whole of life, equally ordered to the mutual well-being of the spouses and to the generation and nurture of children. I argued further that, when marriage is between believing Christians, it is also a sacrament, a prophetic symbol of the presence in the world of the gracious God. Every marriage between Christian believers offers, therefore, two levels of meaning. There is a first, foundational level, the communion of the whole of life between the spouses; and, built on this foundation and bound to it, there is a second, symbolic level on which the communion between the spouses images and represents the communion between Christ and his Church.

Endnotes

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A Promised Lifetime

COLLEEN CAMPION

During my high school years, I held a part-time job at our parish rectory, answering the telephone and the doorbell each weekend. Quite often, I opened the door to welcome engaged couples who came to discuss their wedding with one of the parish priests. On a table near the front door rested a stack of informational materials, including one entitled, “A wedding is a day, a marriage is a lifetime.” The catchy title captured my attention, as it was able in a concise manner to urge couples to place as much attention on preparing for their marriage as they do in planning the wedding. In the course of my years in Catholic high school, we had certainly learned about the sacrament of matrimony and understood it to be a lifetime commitment. Each year we had observed “vocation awareness week,” when we discerned what our own vocational call from God would be. Although marriage was always included in the discussion, the week concentrated heavily on understanding and promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life. My classmates and I always came away feeling that, while marriage was addressed as a sacrament, the clear path to holiness seemed to be through ordination or religious consecration.

In my first year of college, at a venerable Jesuit institution, I met my husband. We dated all through college, and attending the 10 p.m. Sunday Mass together was a hallmark of our courtship. Just after college, we became engaged. As we began to plan our wedding, I could not help but remember that wedding pamphlet in the rectory office all those years before. We thrilled in thinking about our wedding day, but we were mindful that careful preparation would also help us build a marriage that would last a lifetime. Our pre-cana preparation program helped us broaden and deepen our understanding of marriage, enabling us to embrace the role of marriage as sacrament and vocation, intimately linked to our baptism, and ultimately, our path to holiness. Marriage, like baptism, is not a sacrament that “happens” on just the day of the ceremony. Marriage, like baptism, has to be lived out over a lifetime.

As I look back over 26 years, I see that we have tried to live our marriage as a sacrament in innumerable ways, both big and small. When we were first married, my husband was in medical school and residency with a demanding and sometimes grueling on-call schedule. To support him in his

needs, I took on many of the household tasks so that he could sleep and study. Now, many years later, our roles have reversed a bit as my husband supports me in my effort to complete a degree in pastoral ministry while working in a parish. In our support of one another in our career needs, we have each enabled the other to be Christ to the people we serve—him to his patients and me to our parishioners.

Much of our ability to deal with the bigger questions of life stemmed from some basic decisions that seemed small and insignificant at the time. One weekend early in our marriage, when our schedules had been particularly demanding, we were considering what to do for Mass. Tired and overworked, we both contemplated just sleeping that morning. For the first time in our adult lives, we faced the question of why we should or should not go to Mass, accountable to no one else for that decision other than ourselves and God. We did go to Mass. We knew that in our demanding week’s schedule, we had to make God a priority, or God would slip from our lives. Similarly, after our children were born, we moved from one town to another and sought to join a parish. We knew that this was a crucial decision, because our children’s faith lives would grow as a result of the

kind of community we chose. Keeping God at the center of our week through regular attendance at Sunday Mass has nourished and shaped us, enabling us to keep God at the center of each day and each moment, moments so numerous and seemingly mundane, that we are almost unaware that we are honoring our marriage and baptismal vows in those moments.

The most awe-inspiring expression of God's love in a marriage is the gift of children. Just as God's love was so great that it spilled over to us, so with the growth of a family, whether through natural birth or adoption, the married couple's love overflows and expands the circle of selfless love that begins in marriage. With the gift of children, we learn even more fully how to surrender self-interest in order to serve the needs of the others in the family unit. Despite how tired we may be as parents, when the baby cries, we need to surrender to self and put the needs of another before our own. Self-sacrifice is evident in financial decisions to educate our children and provide them with enriching opportunities such as music lessons and scouting

activities. This gift of our children has been such a joy and a constant source of God's presence in our marriage. It is indeed humbling to hold a newborn in your arms and realize that your overwhelming love for this child is perhaps just a small manifestation of the infinite love that God offers to us, and gratitude overflows from the heart. Marriage and family are a very privileged place where this occurs.

Most wives and husbands at one time or another are jokingly told that their spouse is a "saint" to live with them. Saints lead us to God, and the spouses' primary vocation is to do just that: Walk in God's light and lead one another to God. In this vein, my husband is a saint, for he has shown me the face of God in more ways than I can count. I am indeed a much better Christian thanks to his role in my life. He was the first to truly teach me about what it would mean to live marriage as a sacrament. We became engaged over Thanksgiving break during our first year of graduate school, which we were spending in cities located more than 800 miles apart. As we said goodbye at the airport at the conclusion of

that weekend, he expressed to me a feeling of nervousness about flying that he had not experienced before. When I asked him why he felt that way, he said, "Because what happens to me matters now. There is someone else who depends on me, who is affected by every choice I make, and whose happiness is more important than my own. The stakes are just so much higher now." With that simple statement of care and concern for me, he taught me an invaluable lesson about selfless love that mirrors Christ's love for us, and which is the foundation upon which married love and family love are laid. Keeping this belief at the center of marriage is what makes us a sacramental people each and every day and which makes that promised lifetime of marriage a blessing and a joy.

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Endnotes

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A WEDDING BLESSING

My dear friends, let us pray that God's blessing and grace will descend on Tim and Mary Kay, now married in Christ, and that through the sacrament of Christ's body and blood God will unite in love this couple now joined in the holy covenant of marriage.

Blessed are you, O Lord God of Israel, God of Abraham and Sarah, God of Isaac and Rebekah, our Creator, our Redeemer. Your love sustains the human race and fills us with joy. Your compassion and kindness extend from age to age, from the rising even to the setting of the sun.

Blessed are you, who give us life and breath to proclaim your wonders, who give us strength to fulfill your purpose, who give us the example of your powerful love in the life you have poured out for us in Jesus Christ, our brother and our savior.

We praise you, Lord, for you have called us to a new and never-ending covenant and have formed us into your people to do your will and to be a sign of your love and mercy to all the world.

We praise you for you have called us all to holiness, to be a people of peace and thankfulness and generosity, to show forth your goodness in every age.

We praise you, for you have called us into fellowship with one another to continually give you thanks and praise and to show all people your love by the love we have for one another.

Loving and compassionate God, pour out your blessing upon your servants Mary Kay and Tim. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads.

As they commit themselves to one another forever in a bond of love let them entrust themselves anew to you, source of all love and all goodness.

Let your Spirit rest upon them as husband and wife that their lives may bear fruit in children. Let your Spirit rest upon them in their love for each other and in signs of your love, justice, and peace to all men and women.

Make their home a model of your self-giving. Make their work and study a sign of your care for the world.

Bless them with length of days that they may see their children's children and continually sing your praises.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, for you have made human love a sacrament of your tender care for us in Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray, now and always and forever and ever.

AMEN

— John F. Baldwin, S.J.

Faithful Love

MELINDA BROWN DONOVAN

“Love is patient, love is kind... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

So wrote St. Paul in chapter 13 of his First Letter to the Corinthians. This year as my parents celebrated their wedding anniversary, they lived out St. Paul’s words in a way that gave witness to the depth of their sacramental bond.

Elsie and Joe Brown are both 90 years old. They lived in their own home together in Topeka, Kansas, until October 2010, when Elsie’s fragile mobility made it clear that Joe could not continue safely to care for her at home. She moved to a small care facility in their neighborhood, while Joe, fiercely independent, remained in their home. Joe’s failing eyesight has left him legally blind, and lung disease requires him to use a portable oxygen unit at all times. Although this may sound like a frail person, he still mows his own lawn, tends his vegetable garden, and walks 0.6 miles to visit Elsie every day. When Joe makes these daily visits, they mostly hold hands, without a lot of talking, sometimes resting with their eyes closed. It is the comfort of human touch, the close physical proximity of the other, even for a short time, that sustains them.

In June 2011, their 62nd wedding anniversary was fast approaching and Joe wanted to honor the day in a special way. Normally, they have help with meals and cleaning; normally, my sister would have hosted them, but the usual supports were not available. Undaunted, Joe took things into his own hands, and arranged for Elsie to be brought to their home—her first visit there since she had moved to the nursing home eight months earlier. He cleaned the house, cooked a roast beef dinner, baked a loaf of

fresh bread (with the help of his bread machine), and cut a rose from his garden for their table. After sharing this afternoon dinner together in their kitchen, Joe did the dishes while Elsie savored their memories as she browsed through old photo albums. Picture the tender love in this scene.

As my father recounted the events of the day to me, he was clearly delighted and proud of pulling off this wonderful surprise for his bride. But he also fretted about all the complications brought on by his failed eyesight: He dialed the driver four times before he got the right number; he couldn’t tell what was clean and what wasn’t; the thorns pricked him when he tried to cut the rose; he couldn’t tell if the roast was done or not. “Love is patient... kind... bears all things... endures all things.” Even with his frustration, he

was clear: “It was all worth it, because I don’t know how many more times I will have a chance to do it.”

For me, the garden rose on the kitchen table symbolized the beauty and depth of their love in full bloom. The obstacles my father encountered seemed to confirm their covenant that was sealed so long ago. This was a snapshot of what faithful, covenantal love looks like. This marriage relationship is a reflection of God’s abundant, steadfast, faithful, and sacrificial love.

Endnotes

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Her parents, Elsie and Joe Brown, met in second grade while attending a two-room schoolhouse in southwestern Colorado. They were married on June 12, 1949, following their graduation from college and Joe’s service in World War II. Printed with permission.



Naming the Shadows

MICHAEL A. KING

I've seen it often: A beloved church member dies and at the funeral the eulogies go on and on, with the bereaved ones helping to anoint the saint.

But then the eulogizers go home, and the bereaved are left behind to find a foothold for grieving this acclaimed someone—and to deal with the reality that the life of the one who died contained shadows as well as sunshine.

We often avoid naming people's shadows, not only in funerals but also in church. We flinch from our sins, our frailties, and our messes. We choose the fantasy of eternal sunshine over the richness of naming the truth, in all its fierce and sometimes frightening wildness.

After my mother died, I spoke of her wild spirit as I thanked those who had loved her through difficult final weeks. At times the ferocity that had made her grand also made her a challenge to those who knew her. One courageous respondent spoke up, using humor that wrapped my mother in tenderness, and described her encounters with my mother's shadows. Some of those listening seemed bewildered; they hadn't associated Betty D. King, aka "the Queen," with a shadow side.

I think we should more regularly name shadows, not to run people down but because the truth matters—the truth that none of us are saints.

At funerals we're tempted to avoid all talk of human flaws and frailties. We talk instead about a loved one who lived so well that little forgiveness was needed. Deep down we believe that what counts is keeping up appearances and suppressing shadows. But when we do, we miss the opportunity to know and testify to the blessed freedom of being forgiven. If we really believed that beyond all of the shadows is the

embrace of our God, wouldn't we yearn to tell about our loved ones in all their dappled, spotted, shadowed glory?

This was brought home to me by the head nurse at my mother's assisted living unit. With wisdom and grace Valda walked with my mother through her final days. After my mother died, Valda phoned me to share that during those rough days she had been reminded of a haunting line from "Better Than a Hallelujah?" by Sarah Hart and Chapin Hartford: "Beautiful the mess we are."

"I sang that song in church," she told me. "I said, 'Brethren by denomination and Christian by belief we have long suffered in silence when life happens, not wanting to question God's almighty will or ability to know what is best for us. But the Bible is full of individuals who were messes—David, Saul who became Paul, the woman at the well—individuals whom God used in spite of their messy lives. We are all messes in some way, we fail miserably. But God still sees us as beautiful.'"

This is why we must name shadows: By naming them we can turn them from secrets to be hidden into treasures, messes made beautiful.

Of course, life is messier even than ruminations on our messes. Do we, at funerals or in congregational life, really want to put out all the dirty laundry to enable God's power to turn it lovely? I don't believe that we should publicly flagellate ourselves or others. But if we truly believe that shadows can hold treasure as well as curse, then we should be looking for ways to treat ourselves and each other that provide a gracious space for shadows.

This sensitivity may lead us, carefully and in appropriate settings, to celebrate not only how we have managed to be conventionally good but also how God's grace has been present even—and sometimes especially—in our flaws.

I have no formula for doing this, but I can think of one example. Among the worst tragedies I faced as pastor was the death of a young adult from a drug overdose on the very morning she was slated to pick up her mom—who was in a treatment center for mental health and addictions challenges. I had talked with Jessica on the telephone about the trauma of her mom's departure from the home they shared, but I'd never met her. She told me how proud she herself was at having remained clean of drugs for months.

Then I met Jessica. At the funeral home beside a weeping Debbie (on a temporary discharge from the treatment center), I saw how young and lovely Jessica was, and how premature yet final her death was.

At the memorial service we could have celebrated that Jessica was a beautiful woman taken in the prime of life and stopped there. But Debbie wanted the truth named. We agreed that I'd name the elephant: However hard Jessica had tried to stay clean, the drugs had worked even harder. I also reminded everyone how greatly she had been loved—by us, by Debbie, by God, by her many friends.

Afterward, people who'd heard about Jessica told me or her mom stories of their own wounds and addictions. They were haunted by Jessica's fate and the reality that shadows can kill. They also felt deepened trust that amid and through shadows we can be loved—and that Jessica's funeral offered them grace, hope for a decrease in social stigma, and inspiration to move toward transformation.

We need the fierce love of Jesus. Aiming to need little in the way of forgiveness is not good enough. Seeking a spotless Christian walk or church is not good enough. Petty perfectionism yields only pinched living.

My own Anabaptist tradition stresses right living as a Jesus passion. But it fades too easily into the quest to be forgiven little.

People yearn for a Christianity that names the truth, that majors in authenticity, that grasps the power of

inverting our values so we admire the one forgiven much and worry about the one who's forgiven little. We crave a church that knows how to train us in the way we should go and how to restore us when we depart from it; that calls us to be better than we start out being and to make beautiful the messes we become; that grasps the gift of seeing shadows as sources not so much of shame as of our capacity to love; and that shapes us to hear Jesus say, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

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Endnotes

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Life Is Changed, Not Ended

CATHERINE DOOLEY, O.P.

*In him, who rose from the dead,
our hope of resurrection dawned.
The sadness of death gives way
to the bright promise of immortality.*

*Lord, for your faithful people life
is changed, not ended.
When the body of our earthly
dwelling lies in death
we gain an everlasting dwelling
place in heaven.*

Preface for Christian Death I (P77) Excerpt from the English translation of the *Roman Missal* © 1973, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). All rights reserved.

"What is Heaven?" "Where is it?" "How do we get there?" These questions are natural for Christians. It is part of the human psyche to ponder the afterlife.

Our prayers, and especially our liturgical prayers, use a variety of words and phrases to describe life after death. We refer to life everlasting or eternal life (Matthew 18:8 ff), the world to come, seeing God face-to-face (1 John 3:2), being with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:17 and Romans 2:23), a sharing in the resurrection of Christ (Ephesians 4:12), and a place that rewards the faithful (Matthew 25: 34).

Among various faith traditions, similarities are found in the understanding of the afterlife. Many believe that it is an experience of happiness with a reunion of loved ones, a place of peace, forgiveness, and eternal joy in the presence of God. Many religious traditions also hold that the way in which we live this life determines the next. All who speak about heaven, however, recognize the inadequacy of language to portray a reality they want to express and understand.

The liturgy of the Catholic Church offers a response to queries about heaven. The preface "The Hope of Rising in Christ" (P 77) of the eucharistic prayer in the Masses for the Dead proclaims:

*In him who rose from the dead,
our hope of resurrection dawned.
The sadness of death gives way
to the bright promise of immortality.
Lord, for your faithful people, life is changed, not ended.
When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death
we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.*

In him who rose from the dead, our hope of resurrection dawned. This affirmation of faith comes to us from one of the earliest creeds that St. Paul recites to the community in Corinth:

*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures; that he appeared to
Cephas, then to the Twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).*

Paul's listeners knew and believed this creed. He is reminding the community of the reason for their faith and hope: Christ has been raised by the power of God. The good news that Paul preaches is based upon the death and resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ cannot be separated from the resurrection of all believers. "For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised" (1 Corinthians 15:16).

It is the resurrection that enables the community to live in hope. Hope is the desire for eternal life, "placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our strength but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC, #1817). Hope does not imply passivity. Neither does it imply an acceptance of the status quo. Many of the Corinthians that Paul addressed seemed to hold and manifest those in their celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus' preaching in the proclamation of the Beatitudes (CCC, #1820). Hope becomes a reality when individuals and the community live out the beatitudes.

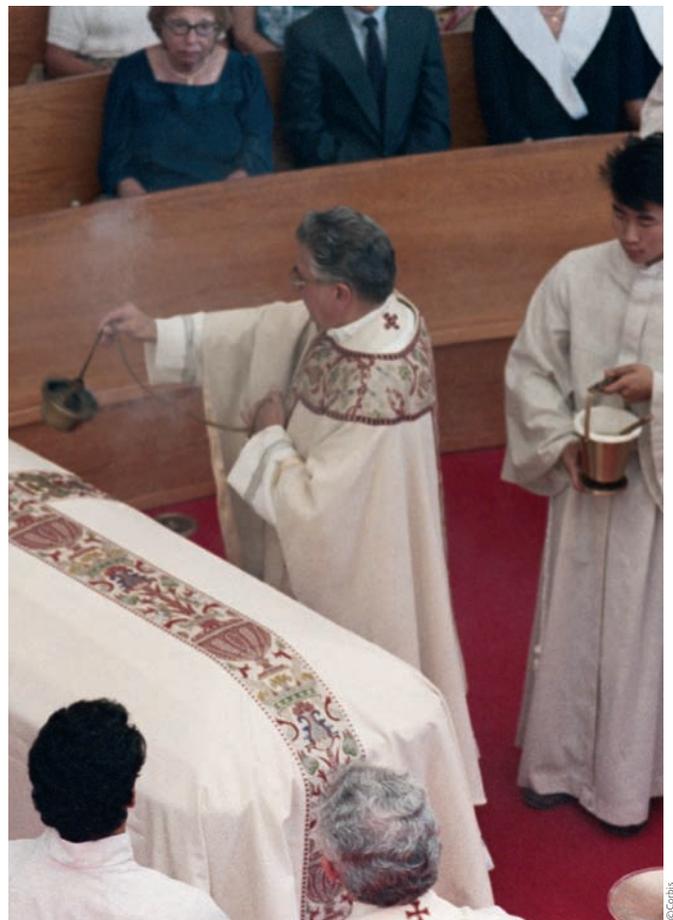
Life is changed, not ended. This proclamation is expounded in the readings of the Liturgy of the Word and of the prayers of the Mass. Our loved ones who have died are with us in a different way. St. Paul asserts that "we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). He firmly states that just as Christ possesses a resurrected body, so, too, will the bodies of all Christians be transformed. "This corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, this mortal body with immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53).

The gospel narrative of the transfiguration of Jesus gives insight into this transformation. In Luke's account of the gospel, Jesus asks the disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "The Messiah of God." Jesus tells the disciples that he will suffer, and that if they truly want to be his disciples, they must take up their cross daily and follow him. Eight days later, Peter, John, and James witness the transfiguration.

While Jesus was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzlingly white. Suddenly, two men were conversing with him—Moses and Elijah who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:29–30).

The conversation with representatives of the law and the prophets calls to mind the Israelite Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, from slavery to freedom, while underlining the passover of Jesus from death to resurrection and ascension that will take place in Jerusalem.

The transfiguration both manifests Jesus in his glory and is a lesson in discipleship. In his eagerness (and in his misunderstanding), Peter wants to prolong the moment of glory by constructing three tents. As the apostle speaks, a cloud envelops them and a voice says, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." The cloud, the symbol of God's presence, recalls the cloud that went before the Israelites on their journey to freedom (Exodus 13:21,



16:10). Jesus will show the disciples that the way of the cross is the path to glory.

Preachers and teachers struggle to find analogies to explain this reality, often using the metamorphosis of the caterpillar to the butterfly. To show continuity and discontinuity between this life and the next, St. Paul turned to the seed and the plant. The seed buried in the ground has one form, and the plant that springs from the ground is in another form. The old life form must give way for the new life form to emerge. The continuity between the seed and plant is accompanied by discontinuity or radical change. Paul uses this image to contrast the resurrected body with the physical body: What is sown corruptible will be raised incorruptible; what is sown dishonorable is raised glorious; the weak will be raised powerful (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

The paschal mystery is the underlying theme in Paul. For St. Paul, mystery is God's plan that is revealed and made known in the saving death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ. Several documents from the Second Vatican Council, but particularly the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (CSL #5–6), renew the emphasis in the preaching of fourth-century mystagogues such as Saints Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose of Milan. The documents affirm that Christ gave glory to God "by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead and glorification." CSL mandates that the

funeral rites express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death.

What are we to understand by “paschal mystery”? Are we to see it simply as Christ’s saving event that brought about our salvation? Clearly, it is that and more. The paschal mystery is not just a past event. Through the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments, it is present in the life of the Church. The Church proclaims and celebrates this mystery of Christ “so that the faithful may live from it and bear witness to it in the world” (CCC, #1068).

The word “mystery” may suggest a reality that is inexplicable. Paschal mystery is a “shorthand” way of summarizing God’s self-gift in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paschal mystery is about relationship, about what it means to be loved with an everlasting love. Perhaps only those who have had the experience of being forgiven when they did not deserve forgiveness, of being loved when they were not particularly lovable, and of being cared for when unable to care for themselves will be able to understand the nature of the self-giving love of God.

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, all who are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are incorporated into the body of Christ. As members of this body, they are empowered by the Spirit and nourished and strengthened at the eucharistic table. The proclamation and celebration of the paschal mystery in the liturgy gives meaning and coherence to the life of the Christian. Having celebrated the paschal mystery sacramentally, Christians are called to make this reality living and active in their actions and attitudes. It is the paschal mystery that marks the beginning and end of a Christian’s life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* names death as the Christian’s last passover. It is the beginning, at the end of the Christian’s sacramental life, of the fulfillment of the new life begun at baptism (CCC, 1682). It is all from one piece.

The Church celebrates the death of a Christian because of its certainty that death is neither the end of life nor of the relationships that encircled the person. “If one member suffers in the body of Christ which is the church, all the members suffer with that member” (1 Corinthians 12:26). The *Order of Christian Funerals* asserts that those who are baptized into Christ and have shared the same eucharistic table are responsible for one another (OCF, #8). At the celebration of the funeral Mass in particular, the Christian community expresses the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of saints. “Though separated from the living, the dead are still at one with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayer and intercession”(General Introduction to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, #6). As in all liturgies, the Christian community celebrates the funeral rites to give praise and thanks to God. In this ritual for the dead, we offer thanks for the gift of a life that has been returned to God, who is the giver of all good gifts. It is in Christian

hope that the Christian community commends the dead to the mercy and love of God for the forgiveness of their sins. The belief in the communion of saints that we profess in the Apostles’ Creed is apparent in all the ritual moments of the funeral rites. Even though the dead are separated from the living, they are nonetheless still united with the living and benefit from their prayers and intercessions. The faith that believers share has come from the apostles. Those who go before us have given us faith. Just as we are baptized in the faith of the Church, we are united in that faith in death.

In the rite of final commendation and farewell, the community acknowledges the reality of separation: “In the sight of the world, he/she is now dead; in your sight may he/she live forever.” The rite recognizes the spiritual bond that exists between the living and the dead. It proclaims that all the faithful will be raised up and reunited in the new heaven and new earth, where death will be no more.

When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven. In a third-century sermon on the kingdom of heaven, St. Cyprian reminds his listeners that the things of the world are not lasting but the one who has done the will of God will live forever. Christians are expected to be single-minded, firm in faith and steadfast in courage, ready for God’s will, whatever it may be.

Banish the fear of death and think of the eternal life that follows it. That will show people that we really live our faith. We are living here now as aliens and only for a time.... who, stationed in a foreign land, would not want to return to their own country as soon as possible. We look upon paradise as our country and a great crowd of our loved ones waits us there, a countless throng of parents, brothers, and children long for us to join them. Assured though they are of their own salvation they are still concerned about ours. What joy both for them and for us to see one another and embrace! O, the delight of that heavenly kingdom where there is no fear of death! O, the supreme and endless bliss of everlasting life!

Sts. Paul and Cyprian and so many others have asked the eternal question through the ages. The query challenges us to understand more fully that the paschal mystery is our life. We participate in that mystery through the celebration of the liturgy and sacraments, and a recognition of the exodus of our daily lives that are lived in care and concern for others, in trust in God’s faithful love here, and in a life everlasting.

Endnotes

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