

Time to Reflect - July 2021

This Summer, in addition to the First Holy Communion and Confirmation celebrations for the children at our parish primary school, we are witnessing God's action through the Sacraments in the lives of a number of our parishioners who have waited for these Sacraments through the past year.

When adults request Sacraments that might normally be given to children, it gives us all two questions to ponder:

first, what do the Sacraments I have received mean in my living out the Christian life;
second, what is it about my living out of the faith that could be an attractive way of life for those I meet?

Let's look at the Sacraments and maybe do some myth-busting:

Baptism

The first sacrament, the beginning of the Christian life and the first sacrament of forgiveness. Did you know this Sacrament is so powerful that when received as an adult, it washes away all sin that they have experienced throughout their life to that point. Imagine that!

Reconciliation or Confession

Arguably one of the least claimed treasures of the life of faith. To know the experience of the Prodigal Son returning to the Father's House, to know the lifting of burdens especially where we carry them for many years. And if what stops you coming to this Sacrament, this gift of Christ to you, is that you don't know the words to say or where to start or that it's been such a long time...just say that when you come and we will give you the words. That is such a small obstacle compared to the beautiful gift of being reconciled with God and his People and being restored to the dignity of our baptism.

The Eucharist

Receiving Holy Communion is sharing in the Last Supper and the miracle of the Feeding of the 5,000 as well as recognising the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross: his Body and Blood given for the life of the world.

If ever we lose sight of the amazement of this gift, let us think of the English Martyrs - priests and laypeople - who had such faith in the Eucharist that they were prepared to go to prison or even to die.

Does it mean that much to us?

Confirmation

There are some very clear links between Baptism and Confirmation:

The Word of God which underpins all of the Sacraments;
a name given (at birth) and a name chosen (at Confirmation);
the Holy oil of Chrism at both;

Godparents at baptism; a sponsor at Confirmation;

The Sign of the Cross made on the forehead at baptism and with Chrism on the forehead at Confirmation;

both are a once in a lifetime Sacrament;

Baptismal Promises at both;
The prayer of the Community.

Matrimony / Marriage

A marriage in the Catholic Church can only be a Sacrament if both parties are baptised as it is a shared Sacrament and baptism is the first sacrament.

A marriage in the Catholic Church can take place between a Catholic and a person of another Christian church, another religion or of no faith.
Even where one party is not baptised, the marriage is valid in the Church.

What makes a Catholic marriage valid are the following requirements:

Freedom to marry
Lifelong Commitment
Openness to children.

Unlike every other Sacrament, it is often said that marriage is not a Sacrament given by a minister (priest / deacon) but that marriage is contracted by the exchange of consent and the mutual commitment given by the couple.

Contrary to popular perception (and probably helped along by films and TV programmes) there is no opportunity for anybody at a Catholic marriage to speak up if they have an objection to the marriage; and nobody promises to 'obey'!

Holy Orders (Ordination)

A threefold Sacrament:
Deacon - Priest - Bishop.

The principal gesture common to all three Ordinations is the ancient practice of passing on faith through the Laying on of Hands.

At the Ordination of a Priest, the candidate's hands are anointed with the oil of Chrism; at the Ordination of a Bishop, the holy oil of Chrism is poured on the head of the new bishop.

Other features of all three Ordination ceremonies are:

The Litany of Saints
The Kiss of Peace given by fellow members of the ministry to which somebody is ordained.

You never stop being a deacon / priest / bishop.

You can retire from offices and responsibilities, but Ordination gives a character that is lifelong.

Anointing of the Sick

Even as it finds itself at the end of the list of the Seven Sacraments, misunderstandings begin by associating the Sacrament of the Sick with the end of life.

The Anointing of the Sick is one of the seven sacraments which give strength for the living. It is not a sacrament for a person who has died.

Although it can be given as a Sacrament near to the end of life, the end of life can be unpredictable (in God's good time, not ours) and it should not be seen as any sort of failure to die without being anointed.

The Church provides prayers for the moments before and after death.

The Anointing of the Sick is a Sacrament that accompanies serious sickness in people of all ages but usually not children.

It can be given for illness of body or mind.

It can be given more than once either as an illness recurs or develops.

It can be given to a person who has become significantly weakened by advanced age.

It is the responsibilities of individuals or the family of a sick person to request this Sacrament when they deem the time to be right (whether at home, in hospital or hospice or in a residential or nursing home. If in doubt, please ask.

This is in line with with the New Testament Letter of St James (Chapter 5:14-15) which reads:

Are there any sick among your?

They must send for the priests of the Church and the priests will pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

The prayer of faith will save the sick person and if they have committed any sins they will be forgiven.

In a hospital setting, you can ask to speak to a Catholic Chaplain.

The oil used in this Sacrament is known as the Oil of the Sick, blessed by the Diocesan Bishop at the Mass of Chrism in the Cathedral during Holy Week.