

God made flesh

Sacraments: Our Life in the Church

Relationships grow through communication. Communication is more than just words. We also communicate with gestures such as smiles, handshakes, hugs, gifts, cards and flowers. In our relationship with God, we too can connect with him through words and also through gestures.

But how does God communicate with us? In the same way really; in words and gestures. There are the scriptures which are God's words to us and there are the sacraments which are gestures of God's love. The Church has named and formally recognised seven sacraments as the powerful ways God reaches out to connect with his people here and now. Pope John Paul II said that a sacrament made visible the invisible mystery of God. The Sacraments of the Church are visible signs that God's presence is real and is among us. They are signs that God loves us.

Each of the seven sacraments of the Church emphasises a different dimension of our relationship with our loving God.

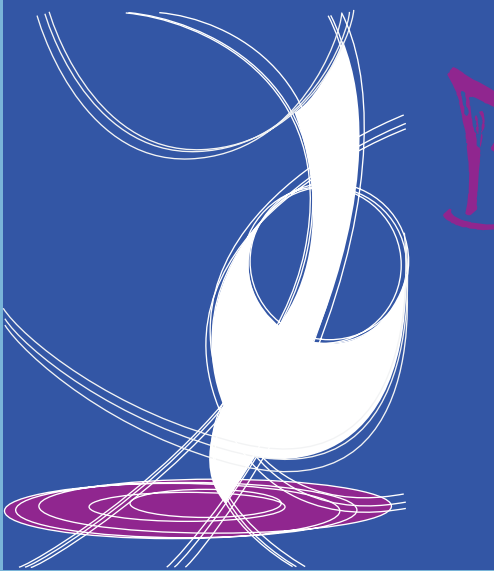
The Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist) highlight our relationship with each person of the Trinity:

- In **Baptism** we become a child of **God the Father** as we are reborn spiritually. We use the symbol of water to signify this rebirth (recalling the waters of our natural birth). Many of the prayers of baptism express belonging, being part of the family of God, and being an heir in God's kingdom, just like a real son or daughter.
- In **Confirmation**, we recommit to our baptismal vows (made on our behalf by our parents and godparents) and we receive the permanent gift ("seal") of the **Holy Spirit**. We are empowered as adult members of the Church to live the Christian life with conviction.
- At our first **Communion** we unite with **Jesus**. When we eat his body and drink his blood, we become one flesh with him. That's why it's called 'communion'; we become one body and one spirit with Jesus.

The Sacraments of Healing (Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick) highlight the merciful nature of God, while **the Vocational** (or Mission) **Sacraments** (Matrimony, Holy Orders) illuminate our call to intimacy with Him and to share his love with others.

[The following pages draw on the insights of the 'Ten Ways to Celebrate the Sacraments' series by Teresa Pirola, The Story Source.]





Baptism

A child of God

When a person is baptised into the Church he enters into a relationship. He or she no longer lives as an individual entity but as a member of the Body of Christ. The baptismal ceremony marks the beginning of this new life of union and ongoing commitment. A baptised adult says, 'Yes, I want to be one with you; I want to live a life faithful to the Gospel'. When an infant is baptised, the parents and godparents make this commitment on the child's behalf.

At the same time, we, the Christian community, pledge ourselves to be in relationship with that person.

Some children in our school for a variety of reasons are not baptised. If your child expresses interest in being baptised, or you would like to have them baptised, please feel welcome to contact your local parish to discuss this further. This, of course, applies to any member in your family who wants to become part of the sacramental life of the Church. Everyone is welcome in our Church and their presence would be a great gift to our Church family.

Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's Baptism.

1. Pray for them. Place a photograph or memento of your child in your Prayer Space and pray for them each day. Ask family and friends, and especially their godparents, to pray also.
2. Prepare a Baptismal candle. Many parishes and Catholic bookshops sell candles already decorated with baptismal symbols. Some families like to decorate their own candle. (Try fabric paint, use pins to hold ribbons, lace or decorative paper in place).
3. Prayer that lasts. Write a prayer (or copy one) that expresses your heartfelt longing for your child to know how deeply loved and treasured they are by God. Write it out in a beautiful card or print it and frame it for your child's room.

Information for adults about the Catholic Faith:
www.catholickenquiry.com

Reconciliation



Saying 'sorry' is different to asking for 'forgiveness'. When we say sorry to someone, it is an 'I-centred statement' expressing sympathy but not necessarily inferring that we take any responsibility. As such it requires nothing from the person to whom we say it. It is always good to say 'sorry' but it is nowhere near as hard to do, or as effective, as asking for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness is an act of vulnerability; not only does it put us in a position of accepting responsibility for hurting the other, it is also a request to be invited back into unity with the person we have hurt. Full reconciliation can only occur in a relationship when we say sorry **and** ask for forgiveness. This is the basis of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but applies equally to any intimate relationship such as with a spouse, a child or family and school/parish community members.

Reunion of Love

People sometimes ask: *Isn't it enough to say sorry to God in my heart?* The Catholic approach to Reconciliation is deeply community-oriented; we are, after all, part of the Body of Christ. So for us, sin is never a private affair. When we sin we hurt not just another, but also ourselves; and when one member of the Body of Christ is hurt, the whole body suffers. Imagine a husband and wife who harshly criticise each other. They can regret their words and say sorry to God. But for the forgiveness of God to really **take effect** in their marriage, they also need to reconcile with one another. Similarly, in Reconciliation we offer a public sign to our faith community that we are sorry for the ways we have undermined the unity of the Church and that we desire to renew our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's First Reconciliation

- 1. Talk about it.** In the lead up to their First Reconciliation use your family meal time to talk about God's mercy and love. Talk about people you know who are very forgiving and compassionate. Share a time when you needed forgiveness.
- 2. Prepare yourself.** Forgive someone against whom you hold resentment. Reflect on how your resentment is making you hurt others. Make a decision to let go and forgive.
- 3. Set an example.** Go to reconciliation yourself, at your child's reconciliation if possible, or immediately before or after. If you are a non-Catholic parent, and it is offered in your parish, go forward for a blessing from the priest.

Confirmation

Empowered by the Spirit

As the name implies, the Sacrament of Confirmation confirms or strengthens the new life received at Baptism. As the bishop makes the Sign of the Cross on the candidates forehead using an oil called *chrism*, he says (by their Confirmation name): *“Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Although the Holy Spirit is received at Baptism, Confirmation focuses on this gift by recalling the promise of Jesus to send the Spirit. In the case of youth, Confirmation is often regarded as a sign of maturity in Christ. Having been baptised as a baby and raised in the Christian life, the youth is now called upon to make a more mature commitment to the Gospel. In particular, Confirmation underlines our commissioning to be bold, apostle-like witnesses to the Gospel.

The use of Chrism (olive oil mixed with balsam) is an ancient biblical custom. It was used to anoint people and objects set aside for service to God and a life of holiness. The word ‘chrism’ is directly related to the Greek word ‘Christos’ which means ‘the Anointed One’. In Baptism and Confirmation we too become ‘anointed ones’, set aside for a holy purpose.



Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's Confirmation

- 1. Prayer Space.** Arrange seven candles or tea-lights, each representing a gift of the Holy Spirit. For the week before the Confirmation, light one each day and talk about the gift of the Holy Spirit that it represents.
- 2. Decorate with the Gifts.** The Spirit came to the apostles at Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire over their heads. For your Confirmation celebration (usually a dinner at home), get seven helium balloons and write/decorate each with one of the seven gifts. Let them rise to the roof inside the room where you are holding the celebration.
- 3. Fire of the Holy Spirit!** Build a bonfire in the backyard and sing some Holy Spirit songs. Invite everyone present to lay hands on your child, asking the Holy Spirit to come upon him/her. (Alternative to the bonfire: light some methylated spirits in a fire proof bowl (about 1 tablespoon) or use a generous collection of candles).

Communion



Sacred Meal

For Catholics, the sacrament of the Eucharist is a sacred meal where we break bread and share the one cup. It is the paramount sign of our unity with and in Christ. It has been described as the 'source and summit' of the Church's life. When we receive the Eucharist we believe that we receive Jesus in an extraordinarily intimate way: we take him into our very beings in the form of food (his body) and drink (his blood). It's a profoundly intimate gesture, similar to the way husband and wife become 'one flesh' in the marital embrace. In fact Pope John Paul II, and many of the mystics and saints before him, wrote extensively about how Jesus' love is like marital love. Jesus described himself in the scriptures as 'the bridegroom'. The Eucharist expresses the intimate, passionate love of Jesus – he yearns to be one in body and soul with us, to be in 'communion'. If you'd like to learn more about Jesus' spousal love, do an internet search for 'the Theology of the Body'.



Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's First Communion

- 1. Make meal-times special.** Just as the Eucharist is at the heart of the life of the Church, family meals are the heart of your home, the 'Domestic Church'. In the lead up to the First Communion Day, use your family meals as an opportunity to share memories of your own first Communion or ask your child about what they are learning in their preparation classes.
- 2. Pray for your child** during their preparation time, especially at Grace before meals. Place their photo in your family prayer space or on the fridge to remind you. Invite their godparents to pray also.
- 3. Gifts that give life.** Expensive toys or treats are not really in the spirit of this event. Rather give gifts that encourage your child's faith like Rosary beads, a Sunday missal, story book of the saints, a Bible, a crucifix etc.
- 4. Prayer Space.** Put symbols of the Eucharist in your family prayer space, like wheat and grapes or a picture of the Last Supper.
- 5. Get to Mass.** It sounds obvious, but if you want your child to understand the importance of this sacrament, you have to make Sunday Mass a priority in your own life. Children learn more from our actions than from our words. Your example will be far more influential in your children's faith development than what he/she learns at school!
- 6. Body and Blood.** Many parishes don't offer first communion under both species. If this is the case in your parish, as soon as possible after their first communion, take your child to a Mass where they can experience receiving both the Body and the Blood of Jesus.

