



# What's What

*A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.*

## Sacraments

### What is a sacrament?

Perhaps the easiest answer to the question "What is a sacrament?" is that a sacrament is an outward (external) sign of God's invisible grace. In other words a sacrament is a way in which God's presence is expressed in such a way that human beings can use their senses to experience this presence of God.

The ultimate expression of this is in the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God became visible as a human being who walked and talked among us. Jesus was not only a sign of God's presence on earth. Since He is the second person of the Trinity, Jesus **was** God, fully present on this earth! For this reason Jesus is often called the *Ur* (or primary/primordial) sacrament. It is from Jesus and his life on earth that all other sacraments flow.

One of the most obvious things that flowed from the life of Jesus on earth was the Church. The Church is the group of followers who, guided by the Holy Spirit, continue to carry out the ministry

of Jesus. For this reason, the Church itself is often considered a sacrament. For, since it is guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church is a visible manifestation of God's continued presence here on earth! Through the promoting of the Holy Spirit, the Church is able to continue the saving work of Jesus.

One way in which the Church carries out the work of Jesus in order to make God's presence known is through the canonical sacraments. Canonical sacraments are the official sacraments of the Church. The canonical sacraments were instituted by Christ. By this we do not mean that Jesus wrote the rituals for these sacraments or told the disciples how to conduct the ceremony for the canonical sacraments. Rather, the Church understands the canonical sacraments as having their origins in the life and work of Jesus on earth. So, baptism, for example flows from the command of Jesus to be reborn, and to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In total, the Catholic Church celebrates seven canonical sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation,

Eucharist, Penance, Anointing, Matrimony and Holy Orders. Through each of these sacraments God's presence becomes visible in an explicit manner. Since human beings are sensory beings (that is, we take in information from the use of our five senses), it is appropriate that God chose to reveal himself to us through means that we can observe with our senses and thereby enter into a relationship with God.

While there are only seven canonical sacraments, the number of sacraments is actually unlimited. This is because any manner in which God manifests himself to a person, is a sacrament for that person. For example, some people are able to look at a sunset and recognize God's presence. The sunset is a sacrament for such people. Parents often time look in the face of their children and recognize the grace God has bestowed upon them. For such parents, the children are sacraments. In other words, the number of sacraments is not limited to the seven canonical sacraments. Anything can be a sacrament if it makes God's presence known to us.

*-Deacon Brian Carpenter*

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Sacraments

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### Things to talk about:

- How many canonical sacraments have you received?
- What things or experiences have been sacraments for you?
- How can you be a sacrament for other people?

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Jesus' first public miracle was at a wedding
- The Water used in baptism is a symbol of our dying and rising with Christ
- In marriage the bride and groom devote themselves to each other to reflect God's love and fidelity to us
- In Penance the words of absolution remind us of God's desire to reconcile the world to himself.





## Saint of the Day: St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153)

On Wednesday, August 20, the Church remembers St Bernard of Clairvaux.

Man of the century! Woman of the century! You see such terms applied to so many today—"golfer of the century," "composer of the century," "right tackle of the century"—that the line no longer has any punch. But the "man of the twelfth century," without doubt or controversy, has to be Bernard of Clairvaux. Adviser of popes, preacher of the Second Crusade, defender of the faith, healer of a schism, reformer of a monastic Order, Scripture scholar, theologian and eloquent preacher: any one of these titles would distinguish an ordinary man. Yet Bernard was all of these—and he still retained a burning desire to return to the hidden monastic life of his younger days.

In the year 1111, at the age of 20, Bernard left his home to join the monastic community of Citeaux. His five brothers, two uncles and some 30

young friends followed him into the monastery. Within four years a dying community had recovered enough vitality to establish a new house in the nearby valley of Wormwoods, with Bernard as abbot. The zealous young man was quite demanding, though more on himself than others. A slight breakdown of health taught him to be more patient and understanding. The valley was soon renamed Clairvaux, the valley of light.

His ability as arbitrator and counselor became widely known. More and more he was lured away from the monastery to settle long-standing disputes. On several of these occasions he apparently stepped on some sensitive toes in Rome. Bernard was completely dedicated to the primacy of the Roman See. But to a letter of warning from Rome he replied that the good fathers in Rome had enough to do to keep the Church in one piece. If any matters arose that warranted their interest, he would be the first

to let them know.

Shortly thereafter it was Bernard who intervened in a full-blown schism and settled it in favor of the Roman pontiff against the antipope.

The Holy See prevailed on Bernard to preach the Second Crusade throughout Europe. His eloquence was so overwhelming that a great army was assembled and the success of the crusade seemed assured. The ideals of the men and their leaders, however, were not those of Abbot Bernard, and the project ended as a complete military and moral disaster.

Bernard felt responsible in some way for the degenerative effects of the crusade. This heavy burden possibly hastened his death, which came August 20, 1153.

*From [www.americancatholic.org](http://www.americancatholic.org)*



### Did You Know

Bernard's life in the Church was more active than we can imagine possible today. His efforts produced far-reaching results. But he knew that they would have availed little without the many hours of prayer and contemplation that brought him strength and heavenly direction. His life was characterized by a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother. His sermons and books about Mary are still the standard of Marian theology.

#### Quote

"In dangers, in doubts, in difficulties, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let not her name depart from your lips, never suffer it to leave your heart. And that you may more surely obtain the assistance of her prayer, neglect not to walk in her footsteps. With her for guide, you shall never go astray; while invoking her, you shall never lose heart; so long as she is in your mind, you are safe from deception; while she holds your hand, you cannot fall; under her protection you have nothing to fear; if she walks before you, you shall not grow weary; if she shows you favor, you shall reach the goal."

-St. Bernard of Clairvaux

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"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.