

Growing in Grace #4—Sacraments

As we Grow in Grace, we wonder what God can do to help us and love us. That is a good question—and it is easy to answer. God is known through all that He has done and is doing in this universe. So, it is easy to see that God uses all parts of His creation to reach out to us, to care for us and help us Grow in Grace. In fact, God is always reaching out to us through His creation.

God uses His creation as channels of His grace and spirit. Though He is using all His Creation to reach out to us, He has chosen specific items through which to channel His Grace to us. In particular, He uses water, oil, bread and wine, and the hands and words of the priests and bishops to channel His grace and help to us. We call these channels: the Sacraments.

Sacraments are God's very specific ways of helping us to Grow in Grace. For example, God works through the water of Baptism to adopt us into His Kingdom. He uses Holy Oil to anoint us for Healing in the Sacrament of Holy Unction. He uses the words of a priest to convey Forgiveness in the Sacrament of Confession. He uses Bread and Wine to give us His grace and power in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He uses the Hands and words of a Bishop to advance us spiritually in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and to ordain priests in the Sacrament of Ordination. He uses the Blessing of a priest to care for couples in Marriage.

In every one of the Sacraments, God uses something in His Creation as a channel through which He can work. That's why the Sacraments are so very important to our growth in grace.

For example, in the Eucharist, Jesus connects Himself to the Bread and Wine so that we can forever call It His Body and Blood. This is not because He has changed it, but rather that the Bread and Wine have become intimately connected to Him. He comes to us through the Blessed Sacrament to nourish us personally. As well since Jesus is right now interceding for us before the Father, at the Altar in the Blessed Sacrament we are joined to Him before the Father. That means that at the Altar, we are interceding with Him too. All this is possible because Jesus channels Himself to us through the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

But what if we have been selfish or self-centred and have turned our backs on God. Even here, Jesus has given us a Sacramental way to be Forgiven and brought back into the Presence of our Saviour—it is called the Sacrament of Confession or as it is called in the Prayer Book, Reconciliation. When we kneel together with a priest and confess our sins, Jesus speaks His Forgiveness through the words of Absolution pronounced by the priest. During His first Resurrection appearance, Jesus gave the Apostles the Authority to Forgive us, and restore us to His loving relationship, and that Authority has been transferred ever since to His priests through the Sacrament of Ordination. Sure, it is important to often confess, but in the Sacrament of Confession, we can hear the Words of Forgiveness pronounced clearly by a priest. What a difference this makes.

You are all aware of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Sacrament of Marriage. But do you know about the Sacrament of Holy Unction? It is the Sacrament of Healing that brings healing and new life to those who are sick. And it works wonderfully.

I have used that Sacrament of Holy Unction many times, and every time I have seen the Healing that Jesus brings. It is done using Holy Oil and the Laying on of Hands of a priest, with prayer. It is often done in the Hospital for a sick patient, or in the person's home, or sometimes at the Altar rail. We read in the Gospels that Jesus healed many times, and I want you to know that His Healing continues today using the Sacrament of Holy Unction. The first time that I used it, it was for a teenage girl who landed in the Hospital, and the doctor told us that she was not going to live. I and another priest anointed her with the Sacrament of Holy Unction and Laid Hands on her with Prayer, and she was restored to life. We saw it, and so did the Nurse and her mother who both were there. They both rejoiced and praised God. It wasn't a miracle; it was Jesus working through the Sacrament of Holy Unction as He taught us. That teenager is alive today, in fact today is a grandmother, and one who praises God every day for her Healing.

Sure, the Lord is not limited to the Sacraments—He continues to help us Grow in Grace using many different ways—but we know that He always is ready to work His new life using the Sacraments. There are 7 Sacraments used by the Church. They are Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Confession, Holy Unction, Ordination and Marriage. Through them all, Jesus channels His Grace and Love to help us Grow in Grace until one day, we become Saints for His honour and Glory.