

Brothers and sisters,

Maybe some of you remember a few years ago when the primary source for religious education was the Baltimore Catechism, which had a Question and Answer format. In many ways, it was a very nice way for people to learn the faith. As I understand it, the goal was to memorize the answer to each question posed by the Catechism. (Whether there was real integration of the answers into a person's life and beliefs was a different matter for a different column.) One of the questions posed by the BC was, "*What is a sacrament?*" Do you know the answer? **A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.** Simple. Let's take a brief moment to look at the three parts of that definition.

What is an outward sign? Well, it is something that *signifies* another thing that is invisible. Think of a kiss. What does a kiss signify? Love or affection. Or think of tears. What do tears signify? Sadness or anger or happiness or excitement or laughter. Clearly more information is needed, but we know they are a sign of some invisible emotion. So, sacraments are tangible, sensible things that signify something invisible. Later on, we'll look at the "stuff" of each sacrament and talk about what is being signified.

Next, sacraments are instituted by Christ. That is to say, we don't just create different sacraments. They are all found and have their basis in the Word of God. This is important. Some are very clearly found in the gospels and some are left by Jesus for the Church to continue to develop, but they are all rooted in the Bible.

Finally, sacraments give us grace. They actually do something for us. They signify something, yes, and that something carries grace with it. What is grace? Grace is power. Think of it like supernatural steroids. What do steroids do? They give someone an unfair advantage over their opponent. What does grace do? It gives us an advantage over our opponent, Satan, so we can actually resist his deceptions and lies. God's grace makes us supernaturally powerful. Without this power we are doomed to fall back into spiritual slavery.

Think about this whenever you receive one of the sacraments. If you ever wonder or doubt whether you really need to receive the sacraments regularly, the answer is a resounding YES! God wants to make us powerful - why wouldn't we want to receive his gift of power? It's this power that makes us capable of overcoming our sinful tendencies, capable of living holy and virtuous lives. It's this power that keeps us peaceful when life becomes chaotic and crazy. It's this power that aids us in keeping the Great Commandment, to love God above all else and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

May the Lord give you his peace!  
Fr. Bryan