

Lay Dominican Formation Program Province of Saint Joseph

Novitiate-Session 7

The Sacraments In Dally Life with Special Consideration tothe Eucharist and the Sacraments of Initiation(Rite of Christian Initiation--RCIA)

I. Introduction

- A. Review of Session 6: Liturgical Prayer/Personal Prayer and its Development

II. Sacraments of Christian Initiation

- A. Brief review of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the process through which adults are fully initiated into the Catholic faith community. It is a faith journey punctuated by ritual. Like all rites, it has three phases - separation, transition, and incorporation. These phases correspond to the three stages of initiation:

1st Stage - Entrance into the catechumenate

One separates oneself from a non-Christian or pagan existence to enter into a training period of Christian life.

2nd Stage - Call and election

The transitional stage in which the catechumen is challenged to accept the tasks of Christians and to emulate them without being a part of the community.

3rd Stage - the Sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist)

In this final stage the individual becomes a part of the Christian community.

The initiation takes place in the midst of the community of the faithful. It gives the faithful a time to reflect upon the value of the Pascal.Mystery, renew their own conversion, &nd by their example guide the initiates in their journey in faith.

History - The initiates of the first centuries were welcomed into the Christian community and journeyed to Christ by sharing in the lives and stories of Jesus of the early Christians. From 30 to 180 there were no formed catechumenal institutions. Beginning with 180 and continuing into the third century, the development of many heresies and the threat of persecution saw the creation of small communities of Christians who gathered around the new members to strengthen their faith and support them in living the Christian life. The first step these catechumens took in the initiation process was entrance into the catechumenate which lasted about three years. At the completion of this period, they took the second step- baptism, if they showed real signs of conversion. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the catechumenate declined but baptismal preparation was renewed. Following the reign of Constantine, Christianity declined as a gospel religion and became more of a state religion requiring little preparation. This deterioration continued until by the eighth century, a period of seven to forty days was all that was required due to the mass "conversions" prompted by Charlemagne. The next centuries saw the disappearance of the catechumenate, the cause of which has sometimes been attributed to infant baptism. Any signs of renewal of the catechumenate over the centuries happened in missionary countries. By the eighteenth century, Cardinal Lavigerie's work in Africa consisted of stages of postulancy for two years, catechumenate for two years, and a major baptismal retreat. The passage from one stage to another was marked by the giving of sacramentals

rather than by liturgical celebrations. Eventually, the European churches added these celebrations and served as the impetus for the reforms of Vatican II.

Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are a sacramental chain. Each sacrament is a stage in the sacramental progress of the Christian. These stages are similar to the stages (origin, development, and nourishing) in natural life. The Christian is reborn to a share in the divine nature by Baptism, is strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and is sustained by the food of eternal life through the Holy Eucharist.

B. Baptism

"Baptism is the sacrament of spiritual rebirth. Through the symbolic action of washing with water and the use of appropriate ritual words, the baptized person is cleansed of all his sins and incorporated into the body of Christ. He becomes a member of the Mystical Body and receives the graces of the supernatural life."

The Second Vatican Council made substantial ritual changes in the liturgical celebration of baptism in order to make the reception of the sacrament more meaningful to those who participate in it and to better dispose them for the blessings the sacrament confers. The sacramental effects of baptism are remission of sins, remission of all punishment due to sin, grace of regeneration, infusion of virtues, incorporation into the body of Christ, and a right to Heaven.

Baptism is not something that happens to us once. It is an ongoing, daily experience. The ceremony serves as the beginning of our relationship with Christ. This relationship should be experienced every day. We can live out this relationship by actively living out faith, hope and love. "We live out faith by expressing faith in our actions, in our words, in our choices. We live out hope by making choices based on trust we have in God and in His promises. We live out love by doing what is pleasing to God and helpful to our neighbor. We live all three by praying to God as our Father, following Jesus as our Savior, and listening for inspirations of His Spirit in our hearts."

C. Confirmation

"A Sacrament of the New Law by which the recipient receives the Holy Spirit through the anointing with chrism by the Bishop in the form of a cross on the forehead, the imposition of hands and saying the words, sign you with the Sign of the Cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'."

Confirmation is always associated with Baptism. It confirms the supernatural life already received and with the Eucharist serves as the means by which the fully confirmed believer is nourished and fortified.

No distinction was made between baptism and confirmation in the early Church since those baptized were all adults. This change occurred with infant baptism. Confirmation is a conversion to a mature relationship with Christ. The adult Christian is asked to bear witness, to carry out the work of the Church which is to continue Christ's mission here on earth. Through this sacrament, Christ assures us that the Holy Spirit is with us at all times to strengthen, enlighten and comfort us in our efforts to fulfill his mission.

Confirmation, which dedicates us to the mission of Jesus, is celebrated in the Offertory of the Mass. Each person participating in the Liturgy of the Eucharist is called upon to make this act of self-oblation

again, and to make it with ever deeper and more personal intent. As the bread and wine are brought forward and transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, each person in the Church offers himself for transformation. It expresses our commitment to a new standard of morality. We are no longer concerned as to whether an action is right or wrong, but whether our action bears witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. Eucharist

"Initiated into the Christian mystery by Baptism and Confirmation, Christians are fully joined to the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the center and heart of Christian life for both the universal and local Church and for each Christian. All that belongs to Christian life leads to the eucharistic celebration or flows from it."

Each passing century of Christianity has contributed the uniqueness of its own insights into the fullness of the eucharistic mystery. Our own moment of history, as perhaps no age before it, has caught a glimpse of the Eucharist as the Lord's Pascal Meal. To appreciate what that means we must understand the Last Supper as Pascal or Passover meal and go back in history to God's Old Testament people to the origin of that Passover Meal at the time of the great exodus. God had promised His people freedom from the slavery of Egypt and asked them to celebrate their liberation before it occurred. The yearly memorial of that Passover Meal became an inviolable tradition among the Jews. Down through the course of history they took each new succeeding Egypt, each new bondage, whether national or personal, to the great act of faith which was the Passover meal, believing that God would rescue them. The Eucharist was born in that Passover atmosphere as Jesus believed in the power of his Father to rescue him. To understand that is to see the Holy Eucharist as the celebration of a new life of freedom which is the promise of God.

This sacrament is a sacrament of love. This love is expressed in communion. At this time we have a deep, union with the Lord. It is the time when He communicates all He is to us and all we are to Him. It strengthens and motivates us for our apostolate - the salvation of souls. We know how good the Lord is and our one desire is to bring all souls to share in His great love for us.

Fr. David M. Knight, in his book, Living the Sacraments: A Call to Conversion, has pointed out how each of the sacraments is celebrated in the celebration of Eucharist. Listed below is a, brief summary:

| <u>Sacrament</u> | <u>Celebrated in Eucharist in</u> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Baptism | Introductory Rites |
| Reconciliation | Liturgy of the Word |
| Confirmation | Presentation of Gifts |
| Matrimony and Holy Orders | Concentration and Elevation |
| Anointing and Eucharist | Communion Service |

III. The Sacraments in the Life of St. Dominic

The sacraments were an integral part of the life of St. Dominic. His love for the Eucharist is clearly pointed out by Bede Jarrett: "The morning Mass he sung whenever he possibly could, arranging his journeys in such a way that he could be certain of staying at some priory, whether of his own Order or not, in time for the celebration of the sacred mysteries." Over and over Dominic's biographers have pointed to his close relationship to Christ as exhibited by his intense personal prayer and his particular devotion to the Mass.

IV. The Rule and the Sacraments

Because the sacraments are so important for the lay Dominican to make progress in the fulfillment of our contemplative and apostolic vocations, the Rule suggests that we 1). actively participate in the celebration of the liturgy and in daily Eucharist if possible and 2). frequently celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

V. Summary

The sacraments are the means that Jesus uses to come to us. In Baptism He comes to save us and to incorporate us into His body. In Confirmation He comes to bring us to Christian maturity, to empower us and to send us on His mission - the salvation of souls. In Eucharist he comes to love us. The richness of these sacraments, especially Eucharist, to bring, about a change of mind and direction in our daily lives can be experienced to a greater degree when we explore their meaning. The more we study, pray and meditate on the Eucharist, the more fully we can participate in this Sacrament. It will then be our nourishment on our journey in faith.

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