

Lesson 16

The Sacraments: Signs of Jesus' Love

Vocabulary

synagogue: Jewish place of worship.

chrism: A special scented and blessed oil used in some of the sacraments.

sign: Something that represents or points to something else.

Concepts of Faith

What is a sacrament?

A physical sign given to us by Jesus, through which Jesus meets us and gives us grace.

What are the seven sacraments?

Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick.

What are the sacraments of initiation?

Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist

What are the sacraments of healing?

Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick.

What are the sacraments of commitment, or vocation?

Holy Orders and Matrimony.

Signs of Jesus' Love

Human beings are both spiritual and physical. God knows that as physical beings we need to experience His love in physical ways. So Jesus, God the Son, shows us His love, the very love of God Himself, in physical ways. The ways in which Jesus shows His love are expressions of His priestly office.

A sign is something that we can experience with our senses. A sign represents or points to something else. Jesus used many physical signs that people were able to experience with their senses. These physical signs represent the love that Jesus has for people. People could hear Jesus' words and see His eyes. People could sense that Jesus

was listening to them, and they could feel love in His healing touch. Jesus' speech, His looks, and the way He listened to people and touched them were all signs of Jesus' love for people. We will read and talk about some of the times that Jesus used physical signs to show His love for people.

The following Bible passage tells us about the love with which Jesus taught. It also tells us how Jesus touched people lovingly and how He looked lovingly at people.

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like “sheep without a shepherd”.

—Matthew 9:35–36

Jesus saw the needs of the people and helped them. Jesus' acts of teaching, healing, and looking were physical signs of His love for people.

In this next Bible passage, we read about how Jesus listened to people and used His hands to show them God's love.

One day an official from the synagogue came to Jesus and told Him that his daughter had just died. He said to Jesus, “But come, lay your hand on her, and she will live.” The official believed that, if Jesus touched his daughter, she would live. A touch is a small gesture, but it turned out to be a powerful one in this case. “When Jesus arrived at the official's house and saw the flute players and the crowd who were making a commotion he said, “Go away! The girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they ridiculed [made fun of] him. When the crowd was put out, he came and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose. And news of this spread throughout all that land.

—based on Matthew 9:18–26

Jesus listened to the official's plea for help. It was through His physical touch that Jesus cured the girl. Listening, teaching, and sometimes touching were signs of His love for people and were expressions of His priestly love.

Here is one more example of how Jesus showed His love for people.

As he continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten lepers met [him]. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voice, saying, “Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!” And when he saw them, he said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” As they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice;

and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus said in reply, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Then he said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."
—Luke 17:11–19

In this passage we see how Jesus spoke with love and touched people lovingly with His words. He looked lovingly at people and listened to them. These are all examples of Jesus' showing His love for people through simple signs.

Signs of the Sacraments

We have read how Jesus exercised His priestly office and touched the people with love through His words and actions. The greatest physical sign of Jesus' love for us was His death on the Cross. But this was not the last sign Jesus left us. Today Jesus still exercises His priestly office and uses physical signs to show His love for us. These physical signs are called the sacraments. A sacrament is a physical sign, given to us by Jesus, through which Jesus meets us and gives us grace.

There are seven sacraments in the Catholic Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick. Each sacrament uses a different sign that shows us Jesus' love.

The sign of Baptism is the water and the words spoken by the person who is baptizing. As the water is poured over the forehead of the person to be baptized, the priest or deacon says the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The sacrament of Confirmation is usually celebrated by a bishop. The sign of Confirmation is oil and the words said by the bishop. The bishop traces the shape of a cross on the person's forehead with oil, called chrism, as he says the name of the person, followed by the words, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."

The sign of the Holy Eucharist is the bread and wine and the words of consecration. At the Consecration of the Mass, the priest says the words of Jesus, "This is my body", over the bread, and "This is the cup of my blood", over the wine.

The sign of the sacrament of Reconciliation is the sorrow we have when we say our sins to the priest and the words of forgiveness said by the priest.

The sign of the sacrament of Matrimony is the bride and the groom and the "Yes" they say to the vows they make to one another.

The sign of Holy Orders is the bishop's laying his hands on the head of the man receiving the sacrament and the prayer the bishop says for the man.

The sign of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is the prayer the priest says and the oil he uses. In this sacrament, the priest anoints the person on the forehead and the palms of the hands with the oil of the sick, while saying a prayer. All the sacraments show us Jesus' love.

We Can Be Touched by Jesus

Like those who lived when Jesus did, we too can be touched by Jesus—through the sacraments. Jesus gave the Church the seven sacraments. Through the sacraments, Jesus exercises His priestly office, and we can experience Jesus' gentle and loving touch. Christ is not only present in the sacraments; through the sacraments, He reaches out to touch us and to be with us. Through the sacraments, we experience His merciful love. When a sacrament is celebrated, we see a deacon, priest, or bishop. However, it is really Jesus Who is celebrating the sacrament. In all the sacraments, Jesus gives us grace, God's life. Why is it necessary for Jesus to give us grace? Because we are conceived and born without grace.

Remember, at the beginning of creation, God loved Adam and Eve, but Adam and Eve refused to love God in return. They sinned. Because they refused to return God's love, Adam and Eve lost grace for themselves and us. As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we are conceived and born without grace.

Jesus came to overcome Adam and Eve's sin. God the Father loved Jesus, and Jesus loved God the Father in return. Jesus showed the depth of His love by dying on the Cross. By dying on the Cross, Jesus gave His entire life to the Father and returned God the Father's love. Because Jesus returned God the Father's love, He overcame Adam and Eve's sin and made it possible for us to share God's life again. With God's life (grace), we can return God the Father's love, and we can love ourselves and others. With grace, we can live with God in heaven.

Grace

In the sacraments Jesus gives us grace. When we are baptized, we receive grace for the first time. We begin to share God's life. We start our journey to heaven. Each time we receive a sacrament, grace is strengthened in us, and we walk the path to heaven. As a plant needs water for its life to grow stronger, so we need the sacraments for God's life in us to grow stronger. On the other hand, just as a disease makes a plant's life weaker, so does sin make God's life in us weaker. Sin takes us off the path to heaven. Jesus, through the sacraments, is our source of grace. In this passage from the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches us the importance of staying close to Him.

“Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.”

—John 15:4–7