

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

I'm Here for the Grace of the Sacrament

Over the past few weeks, we have been discussing how God is present in our lives. Sometimes these moments can be rather sublime, but God so wants to be a part of our lives, that He has given us some very explicit experiences of His presence. These explicit moments are called Sacraments. Jesus wanted us to know that He will always be with us, so He has given us the Sacraments to remind us of the many ways and many specific times that He remains with His people, "until the end of the age." [MT 28:20]

As you may recall, it is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus continues to be present in our world today. "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you." [JN 14:26] The Holy Spirit is God's presence in the world today and the Spirit's presence in our lives is defined as God's "grace." According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), "Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. There are sacramental graces, gifts proper to the different sacraments." [CCC 2003] This statement from the Catechism confirms that our Sacraments, the Sacraments that Jesus gave us, are explicit moments of God's grace and presence. In fact, the classic definition of a sacrament is that it is "an outward sign, instituted by Christ, of an inward grace."

In the Catholic Church, we have seven Sacraments, and in the weeks to come we will discuss each of them in more detail. The Sacraments are divided into categories that pertain to the different ways that God wants to be a part of our lives. The categories are as follows:

Sacraments of Initiation (the Sacraments that incorporate us into the Body of Christ and connect us more deeply to Christ Himself): Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

Sacraments of Healing (the Sacraments where God reaches out to us in our brokenness to make us whole): Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick

Sacraments of Vocation (the Sacraments that call us to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in a specific manner): Marriage and Holy Orders

As you can see, each of the categories of Sacrament pertains to special circumstances in our lives where God reaches out to us. Moreover, the individual Sacraments further define and explain these connections with God.

Next week, we'll begin our discussion of the individual Sacraments with the first of all the Sacraments, Baptism.

