

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM

DAY FIVE

THE SACRAMENTS AND SACRAMENTALS: CHRIST SANCTIFIES EVERY STAGE OF HUMAN LIFE

Chapter III, Sections 59-82

On Day Four, we stood at the center of the Church's liturgical life: the Most Holy Eucharist. We saw that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* calls the Mass the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, instituted to perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries. We also saw that the Council called for a revision of the rite of Mass while requiring its substance to be preserved.

Today the Constitution turns from the Eucharist to the other sacraments and to the sacramentals. The movement is natural. The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life, but the grace of Christ reaches the faithful throughout life by means of the entire sacramental economy.

Baptism gives new birth in Christ. Confirmation strengthens the baptized by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Penance restores the sinner to grace. Anointing unites the sick and dying to the suffering and victory of Christ. Holy Orders configures men to Christ for sacred ministry. Matrimony sanctifies the covenant of husband and wife. The sacramentals prepare us to receive grace and consecrate the circumstances of daily life to God. Religious profession offers an entire life to God. Christian burial places death beneath the light of the Resurrection.

Chapter III therefore presents Catholic life as sacramental from beginning to end.

The Council does not speak of the sacraments as empty ceremonies or merely communal affirmations. It says that they sanctify men, build up the Body of Christ, give worship to God, nourish and strengthen faith, and impart grace. The sacramental rites teach precisely because Christ acts through visible signs entrusted to His Church.

At the same time, the Council unquestionably calls for the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals to be revised. Its stated purpose is for their meaning to be clearer, the faithful's participation to be more fruitful, and certain pastoral needs to be addressed.

Once again, therefore, we must read with two questions in mind:

What does the Council teach about the sacraments and sacramentals?

And:

What revisions does the Council actually command or permit in Sections 59-82?

The first question concerns the enduring doctrine of the Church. The second concerns liturgical discipline and pastoral judgment. They belong together, but they must not be confused.

I. READ

Read Chapter III, Sections 59-82: "The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals," in the official text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

59. The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "sacraments of faith." They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.

It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs, and should frequent with great eagerness those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life.

60. Holy Mother Church has, moreover, instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments: they signify effects, particularly of a spiritual kind, which are obtained through the Church's intercession. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.

61. Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event in their lives; they are given access to the stream of divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the passion, death, the resurrection of Christ, the font from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is hardly any proper use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God.

62. With the passage of time, however, there have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals certain features which have rendered their nature and purpose far from clear to the people of today; hence some changes have become

necessary to adapt them to the needs of our own times. For this reason the sacred Council decrees as follows concerning their revision.

63. Because of the use of the mother tongue in the administration of the sacraments and sacramentals can often be of considerable help to the people, this use is to be extended according to the following norms:

a) The vernacular language may be used in administering the sacraments and sacramentals, according to the norm of Art. 36.

b) In harmony with the new edition of the Roman Ritual, particular rituals shall be prepared without delay by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 2, of this Constitution. These rituals, which are to be adapted, also as regards the language employed, to the needs of the different regions, are to be reviewed by the Apostolic See and then introduced into the regions for which they have been prepared. But in drawing up these rituals or particular collections of rites, the instructions prefixed to the individual rites the Roman Ritual, whether they be pastoral and rubrical or whether they have special social import, shall not be omitted.

64. The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this, means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time.

65. In mission lands it is found that some of the peoples already make use of initiation rites. Elements from these, when capable of being adapted to Christian ritual, may be admitted along with those already found in Christian tradition, according to the norm laid down in Art. 37-40, of this Constitution.

66. Both the rites for the baptism of adults are to be revised: not only the simpler rite, but also the more solemn one, which must take into account the restored catechumenate. A special Mass "for the conferring of baptism" is to be inserted into the Roman Missal.

67. The rite for the baptism of infants is to be revised, and it should be adapted to the circumstance that those to be baptized are, in fact, infants. The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more clearly in the rite itself.

68. The baptismal rite should contain variants, to be used at the discretion of the local ordinary, for occasions when a very large number are to be baptized together. Moreover, a shorter rite is to be drawn up, especially for mission lands, to be used by catechists, but also by the faithful in general when there is danger of death, and neither priest nor deacon is available.

69. In place of the rite called the "Order of supplying what was omitted in the baptism of an infant," a new rite is to be drawn up. This should manifest more fittingly and clearly that the infant, baptized by the short rite, has already been received into the Church.

And a new rite is to be drawn up for converts who have already been validly baptized; it should indicate that they are now admitted to communion with the Church.

70. Except during Eastertide, baptismal water may be blessed within the rite of baptism itself by an approved shorter formula.

71. The rite of confirmation is to be revised and the intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation is to be more clearly set forth; for this reason it is fitting for candidates to renew their baptismal promises just before they are confirmed.

Confirmation may be given within the Mass when convenient; when it is given outside the Mass, the rite that is used should be introduced by a formula to be drawn up for this purpose.

72. The rite and formulas for the sacrament of penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament.

73. "Extreme unction," which may also and more fittingly be called "anointing of the sick," is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived.

74. In addition to the separate rites for anointing of the sick and for viaticum, a continuous rite shall be prepared according to which the sick man is anointed after he has made his confession and before he receives viaticum.

75. The number of the anointings is to be adapted to the occasion, and the prayers which belong to the rite of anointing are to be revised so as to correspond with the varying conditions of the sick who receive the sacrament.

76. Both the ceremonies and texts of the ordination rites are to be revised. The address given by the bishop at the beginning of each ordination or consecration may be in the mother tongue.

When a bishop is consecrated, the laying of hands may be done by all the bishops present.

77. The marriage rite now found in the Roman Ritual is to be revised and enriched in such a way that the grace of the sacrament is more clearly signified and the duties of the spouses are taught.

"If any regions are wont to use other praiseworthy customs and ceremonies when celebrating the sacrament of matrimony, the sacred Synod earnestly desires that these by all means be retained" [41].

Moreover the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 52, of this Constitution is free to draw up its own rite suited to the usages of place and people, according to the provision of Art. 63. But the rite must always conform to the law that the priest assisting at the marriage must ask for and obtain the consent of the contracting parties.

78. Matrimony is normally to be celebrated within the Mass, after the reading of the gospel and the homily, and before "the prayer of the faithful." The prayer for the bride, duly amended to remind both spouses of their equal obligation to remain faithful to each other, may be said in the mother tongue.

But if the sacrament of matrimony is celebrated apart from Mass, the epistle and gospel from the nuptial Mass are to be read at the beginning of the rite, and the blessing should always be given to the spouses.

79. The sacramentals are to undergo a revision which takes into account the primary principle of enabling the faithful to participate intelligently, actively, and easily; the circumstances of our own days must also be considered. When rituals are revised, as laid down in Art. 63, new sacramentals may also be added as the need for these becomes apparent.

Reserved blessings shall be very few; reservations shall be in favor of bishops or ordinaries.

Let provision be made that some sacramentals, at least in special circumstances and at the discretion of the ordinary, may be administered by qualified lay persons.

80. The rite for the consecration of virgins at present found in the Roman Pontifical is to be revised.

Moreover, a rite of religious profession and renewal of vows shall be drawn up in order to achieve greater unity, sobriety, and dignity. Apart from exceptions in particular law, this rite should be adopted by those who make their profession or renewal of vows within the Mass.

Religious profession should preferably be made within the Mass.

81. The rite for the burial of the dead should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death, and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions found in various regions. This holds good also for the liturgical color to be used.

82. The rite for the burial of infants is to be revised, and a special Mass for the occasion should be provided.

Sections 59-61 provide the doctrinal foundation for the entire chapter. Here is an overview of what it says:

Section 59 teaches that the sacraments have three inseparable purposes: the sanctification of man, the building up of the Body of Christ, and the worship of God. Because they are signs, they also instruct. They presuppose faith, but they do more than presuppose it: through sacred words and visible realities they nourish, strengthen, and express faith. They truly impart grace, while their worthy celebration disposes the faithful to receive that grace fruitfully, worship God rightly, and practice charity.

This paragraph endeavors to protect us from reducing the sacraments in either of two directions. They are not magical actions that bear fruit without any call to faith, conversion, or proper disposition. But neither are they merely human teaching devices whose only effect is to

remind the community of religious ideas. They are efficacious signs instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church. Christ acts through them.

Section 60 turns to sacramentals. Unlike the seven sacraments, sacramentals were instituted by the Church. They resemble the sacraments as sacred signs, but their effects – especially spiritual effects – are obtained through the intercession of the Church. They dispose us to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify the varied circumstances of life.

Section 61 offers a magnificent vision of Catholic life. For the well-disposed faithful, the sacraments and sacramentals sanctify almost every event of life. Their power flows from the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Even the proper use of material creation can be directed toward the sanctification of man and the praise of God.

The Church does not teach us to escape the material world. Water, oil, bread, wine, touch, spoken words, bodily gestures, marriage, sickness, death, time, work, homes, fields, meals, and human relationships can all be placed beneath the grace and blessing of God. Catholic sacramentality declares that creation, wounded by sin but redeemed by Christ, can become a bearer of sacred meaning.

But the Council's words concerning the proper use of material things must be read with precision. Created things may be blessed and employed in divine worship because they come from God and can be set apart for His service. They possess no independent divinity or spiritual power, and they must never become objects of religious worship. The Catholic use of creation always points beyond the creature to the Creator and remains subordinate to Jesus Christ.

Section 62 then identifies the reason for revision. Over time, this section states, features had entered the rites that could obscure their nature and purpose for the people of the Council's time. The Council therefore judges that certain adaptations have become necessary. This is a real call for reform, but it follows Sections 59-61. The rites are to be revised so that the sacramental mysteries may be more clearly perceived and more fruitfully received – not because the Church's doctrine of the sacraments has become obsolete.

Section 63 permits and extends the use of the vernacular in the administration of sacraments and sacramentals according to the principles already established in Section 36. It also directs competent territorial authority to prepare particular rituals adapted to regional needs, subject to review by the Apostolic See. The pastoral, rubrical, and social instructions attached to the rites are not to be omitted.

This once again shows a pattern we have already encountered: local adaptation is possible, but it is not independent invention. The Church's competent authority governs the rites, and the Apostolic See retains its responsibility.

Sections 64-70 concern Baptism and Christian initiation.

Section 64 calls for the restoration of the adult catechumenate in distinct stages. The catechumenate is not merely a class ending in a ceremony. It is a period of conversion, instruction, prayer, and gradual incorporation into the life of the Church, marked by sacred rites at successive moments.

Section 65 permits, particularly in mission territories, certain elements from a people's initiation customs to be admitted when they can be adapted to Christian worship. This permission remains governed by the principles of Sections 37-40. Inculturation is therefore neither the uncritical acceptance of every cultural practice nor the unnecessary destruction of everything native. Every element must be purified, judged, and made subordinate to the truth of Christ.

Section 66 calls for the revision of both the simpler and more solemn rites for adult Baptism in view of the restored catechumenate. It also requests a special Mass for the conferral of Baptism.

Section 67 directs that the rite for infant Baptism be adapted to the reality that the person being baptized is an infant. The roles and duties of parents and godparents are to appear more clearly in the rite.

Section 68 asks for adaptations when large numbers are baptized and for a shorter form usable in mission territories. It also recognizes that the Church's perennial teaching that, in danger of death and in the absence of a priest or deacon, a member of the faithful can baptize according to the Church's intention using the proper matter and form.

Section 69 requests rites that make two situations clearer. First, when an infant has already been validly baptized in a shorter rite, the later ceremony must not suggest that the child is only then becoming baptized or becoming a member of the Church. Second, Christians already validly baptized are not to be baptized again when they enter full communion with the Catholic Church. A distinct rite should make clear that they are being received into Catholic communion.

Section 70 permits baptismal water outside Eastertide to be blessed within the rite itself using an approved shorter formula.

Section 71 concerns Confirmation. Its rite is to be revised so that Confirmation's intimate connection with all Christian initiation becomes clearer. The renewal of baptismal promises is commended immediately before Confirmation, and celebration within Mass is permitted when convenient.

Section 72 gives a concise but important instruction concerning Penance: its rite and formulas are to be revised so that the nature and effect of the sacrament are more clearly expressed. The Council does not redefine sin, contrition, confession, satisfaction, absolution, or the priestly power to forgive sins. It asks that the rite manifest the sacrament more clearly.

Sections 73-75 concern the Anointing of the Sick.

Section 73 explains that the traditional name "Extreme Unction" may fittingly be called "Anointing of the Sick." This is not merely a change in vocabulary. It corrects the widespread impression that the sacrament should be delayed until the final moments before death. The Council teaches that the proper time has arrived when a person begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age.

This does not turn Anointing into a general blessing for every minor illness. Nor does it deny its importance in preparation for death. It places the sacrament within its broader apostolic and traditional purpose: Christ visits, strengthens, forgives, and sanctifies His suffering members.

Section 74 asks for a continuous rite joining Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum when appropriate. Section 75 calls for the number of anointings and the prayers to be adapted to circumstances and to the condition of the sick person.

Section 76 concerns Holy Orders. Both the ceremonies and texts of ordination are to be revised. The bishop's address may be given in the mother tongue, and at an episcopal consecration all bishops present may participate in the laying on of hands.

The section concerns the form in which the rite is celebrated. It does not change the divine institution of Holy Orders, the distinction among bishop, priest, and deacon, the sacramental character of ordination, or the reservation of priestly ordination to men.

Sections 77-78 concern Matrimony.

The marriage rite is to be revised and enriched so that the grace of the sacrament and the duties of the spouses are more clearly expressed. Praiseworthy regional customs are to be retained. Legitimate local adaptation is permitted, but the priest assisting must always ask for and receive the consent of the contracting parties.

Section 78 states that Matrimony should normally be celebrated within Mass. The nuptial blessing is to recognize the mutual obligation of fidelity. Even when Matrimony is celebrated outside Mass, Sacred Scripture and the Church's blessing remain integral to the rite.

These paragraphs assume the enduring Catholic doctrine of marriage: one man and one woman freely exchange consent, enter an exclusive and indissoluble covenant, and receive sacramental grace to live their vocation faithfully, welcome children, and help one another toward holiness.

Section 79 returns to the sacramentals. Their revision should foster intelligent, active, and ready participation and respond to genuine contemporary circumstances. New sacramentals may be established when a real need appears. The number of reserved blessings is to be small, and qualified laypersons may administer certain sacramentals in particular circumstances at the discretion of the ordinary.

This must not be interpreted as erasing the difference between ordained ministry and the baptismal dignity of the laity. Some blessings and liturgical acts properly belong to bishops, priests, or deacons. Other sacramentals may be entrusted to laypersons by the authority of the Church. No one possesses a private power to create sacramentals or assume liturgical functions the Church has not given him.

Section 80 calls for revision of the consecration of virgins and for a rite of religious profession and renewal of vows marked by unity, sobriety, and dignity. Religious profession should preferably take place within Mass. The consecrated life is thereby shown not as a private spiritual project but as an ecclesial offering joined to Christ's Sacrifice.

Sections 81-82 concern Christian burial.

The funeral rite should express more clearly the Paschal character of Christian death and take legitimate regional circumstances into account, including liturgical color. The burial of infants is also to be revised, with a proper Mass provided.

Christian burial neither pretends that death is harmless nor grieves as those who have no hope. The Church prays for the dead, comforts the living, honors the body that was a temple of the Holy Spirit, and proclaims that Christ has conquered death. The Paschal character of the funeral is not shallow optimism. It is hope purchased by the Cross.

Taken together, Sections 59-82 give us several governing principles.

First, the sacraments truly impart grace. They do not merely symbolize a grace produced elsewhere.

Second, the sacraments are ordered to sanctification, the building up of the Church, and the worship of God.

Third, sacramental signs instruct and nourish faith. Clarity in the rites therefore matters.

Fourth, the sacramentals carry the Church's prayer into the concrete circumstances of human life.

Fifth, the rites may be revised by legitimate authority for the genuine good of the faithful.

Sixth, legitimate adaptation does not mean private invention, doctrinal alteration, or rupture with the Church's received worship.

II. SCRIPTURE

The sacramental life of the Church begins with Jesus Christ. The sacraments are not later decorations added to a Gospel that was originally without visible signs. The Incarnate Son Himself uses material realities, bodily actions, and spoken words as instruments of His saving work.

St. John tells us: **"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).**

The foundation of sacramentality is the Incarnation. The invisible God comes to us in the visible humanity of Jesus Christ. The Son of God takes a true body, speaks with a human voice, touches the sick, uses water, receives the anointing of oil, gives bread and wine, breathes upon His Apostles, and allows blood and water to flow from His pierced side.

God knows that we are not angels. We are embodied creatures. He therefore meets us through signs that can be heard, seen, touched, received, and enacted. The visible sign does not compete with invisible grace. By Christ's institution, it serves grace.

Our Lord commands Baptism: **"Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19).**

And He teaches its necessity: **"Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).**

After Pentecost, St. Peter does not invite the crowd to an invisible faith detached from the Church's sacramental life. He tells them: **"Do penance, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins: and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).**

The apostolic pattern holds together faith, repentance, Baptism, forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and incorporation into the Church.

Confirmation is illuminated by the laying on of apostolic hands: **"Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:17).**

The sacrament of Penance rests upon the authority given by the risen Christ: **"Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).**

The priest does not forgive by his own moral excellence or personal power. Christ acts through the ministry He established. This is why the sacrament brings objective forgiveness when it is validly celebrated and properly received.

The Anointing of the Sick appears explicitly in the Letter of St. James: **"Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man: and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:14-15).**

Here we find the elders of the Church, prayer, anointing with oil, the name of the Lord, strengthening, and forgiveness. Anointing is not superstition. It is an apostolic sacrament of Christ's mercy.

Holy Orders belongs to Christ's continuing care for His flock. St. Paul tells Timothy: **"Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the priesthood" (I Timothy 4:14).**

And again:

"Stir up the grace of God which is in thee, by the imposition of my hands" (II Timothy 1:6).

Grace is given for sacred ministry through the laying on of hands. Ministry is received, not self-appointed.

Matrimony reaches back to creation: **"Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).**

Our Lord takes up this passage and adds: **"What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6).**

St. Paul reveals that Christian marriage participates in the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church: **"This is a great sacrament: but I speak in Christ and in the church" (Ephesians 5:32).**

The spouses' mutual fidelity is not merely a private arrangement. It becomes a living sign of Christ's faithful and fruitful love for His Bride.

Scripture also gives the foundation for sacramentals. Material creation can be received with thanksgiving and sanctified by prayer: **"For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be rejected that is received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I Timothy 4:4-5).**

Holy water, blessed candles, ashes, palms, medals, scapulars, homes blessed in the name of God, and the many blessings of the Church are not rival sacraments or Catholic charms. They direct created things toward God, call the faithful to prayer, and dispose receptive hearts to grace.

Finally, Christian burial stands beneath the promise of resurrection: **"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live" (John 11:25).**

And St. Paul writes: **"For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them who have slept through Jesus, will God bring with him" (I Thessalonians 4:14).**

The Church buries her children in grief, prayer, and hope. She does not canonize every deceased person at the funeral. She commends the dead to God's mercy and proclaims the victory of Christ.

III. REMEMBER – WHAT CAME BEFORE?

Long before Vatican II, the Church taught that Christ instituted several sacraments and entrusted them to His Church as efficacious signs of grace. The Council of Trent defended this sacramental economy against claims that the sacraments were merely external signs of Christian profession or that they did not truly confer the grace they signify.

Trent also taught the importance of proper disposition. Grace is God's gift, not our achievement, yet the fruitfulness of sacramental reception can be obstructed by unbelief, lack of repentance, sacrilege, or careless preparation. The same balance appears in Section 59: the sacraments impart grace, and their celebration disposes the faithful to receive that grace fruitfully.

There is no contradiction between objective sacramental efficacy and personal conversion. Because Christ acts, the sacrament is more than our feeling. Because we are called to faith and charity, the sacramental life is not mechanical.

Pope Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* also helps us interpret this chapter. He taught that the sacred liturgy includes the whole public worship of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ – Head and members. Liturgical worship is therefore both interior and exterior. The visible rites are necessary because man is body and soul, but exterior worship must awaken and express interior union with Christ.

That teaching stands behind the Council's concern for understandable signs. The point is not to strip the liturgy of mystery until everything becomes ordinary. Nor is it to preserve ceremonies as though obscurity were itself sacred. The purpose of the signs is to lead the faithful into the mystery they signify.

Mediator Dei also warns against the belief that an ancient practice is necessarily better simply because it is ancient. The Church is a living body. Legitimate development can occur under her authority. But authentic development safeguards doctrine and grows from the tradition rather than treating inherited worship as raw material for unlimited reconstruction.

This warning is particularly relevant to the restoration of the catechumenate and the adaptation of rites. The ancient catechumenate contained genuine wisdom. Restoring its essential structure could answer a real pastoral need. But the word "restoration" cannot justify the arbitrary selection of ancient fragments or the rejection of centuries of legitimate development.

The preconciliar Roman Ritual also reveals how deeply Catholic worship already sanctified daily life. It contained blessings for homes, fields, food, travelers, the sick, mothers, children, tools, and many other circumstances. The Council did not discover for the first time that ordinary life could be consecrated to God. Section 61 receives and celebrates a thoroughly traditional Catholic instinct.

At the same time, the Council sought revisions that it believed would help the faithful understand and participate more fruitfully. The restoration of a staged catechumenate for adults is one important example. In many places, what later became the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults helped recover the truth that conversion is a journey into the faith, worship, and communion of the Church – not merely the completion of academic requirements.

The same continuity must guide our understanding of the Anointing of the Sick. The council did not create a new sacrament to replace Extreme Unction. It emphasized a fuller traditional understanding of the same sacrament, correcting the pastoral habit of waiting until death was moments away. Scripture itself speaks of priests praying over and anointing the sick.

Likewise, when the Council asks for the marriage rite to show the spouses' duties more clearly, it does not make marriage a product of the couple's preferences. Their consent is essential, but the nature of marriage comes from God. A rite can be enriched pastorally only if it continues to express unity, fidelity, indissolubility, openness to life, and sacramental grace.

Thus the pattern remains the same as in earlier days: The Council calls for reform. The reform must serve the mystery already entrusted to the Church. The signs may be clarified. The grace signified is not reinvented.

IV. BENEDICT XVI

Benedict XVI repeatedly emphasized that Christianity is sacramental because it begins with God's action, not ours. We do not ascend to God by constructing a religious experience. God descends to us, takes flesh, enters history, and gives Himself through the Church.

In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Benedict teaches that the Eucharist stands at the center and goal of the sacramental life. Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Anointing, Holy Orders, and Matrimony are not isolated religious ceremonies. Each finds its place within the one Paschal Mystery of Christ, and each is ordered in its own way toward communion with Him.

Benedict describes Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist as an interconnected process of Christian initiation. Baptism incorporates us into Christ and His Church. Confirmation strengthens the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist brings initiation to its sacramental completion and continually nourishes the life first given in Baptism.

This gives depth to Sections 64-71. A restored catechumenate and revised rites should not merely make ceremonies more approachable. They should help the faithful understand that Christian initiation is death and resurrection with Christ, incorporation into His Body, reception of the Holy Spirit, and entry into Eucharistic communion.

Benedict also insists upon the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and Penance. Love for the Eucharist should lead to appreciation of Confession. If we lose the sense of sin, we will eventually lose the meaning of sacramental mercy. And if we no longer believe that Christ truly gives Himself in the Eucharist, we will no longer understand why serious preparation and reconciliation matter.

The revision requested in Section 72 therefore bears a demanding responsibility. The rite must express both the nature and effect of Penance. It should reveal sin as an offense against God and a wound to ecclesial communion; contrition as sorrow and conversion; confession as truthful self-accusation; absolution as the merciful judgment of Christ through His priest; and satisfaction as a beginning of repair.

Concerning Anointing, Benedict places the sick person within Christ's own self-offering. Suffering is not romanticized, and bodily healing is not guaranteed. Yet the sick are not abandoned or useless. United to Christ, their suffering can become an offering within the communion of saints. Viaticum then appears as food for the final journey – the pledge of resurrection given by the Lord who has conquered death.

In speaking of Holy Orders, Benedict warns that the priest must not place himself or his personality at the center. The ordained minister is not the owner of the liturgy. His humility is shown in fidelity to the rite and transparency to Christ. This principle applies not only to Mass but also to Baptism, Penance, Anointing, Matrimony, funerals, and every sacred celebration.

Benedict's theology of liturgy helps us understand why ritual form matters. Liturgy is not merely information about grace. It is the Church's received form of prayer in which Christ acts. Fidelity, beauty, silence, sacred language, gestures, music, and reverence help the signs disclose the

mystery. Improvisation can obscure the truth precisely because it draws attention away from the action of Christ and toward the preferences of the celebrant or community.

V. PILLARS COMMENTARY

The Sacraments Belong to Christ

The first and most important truth in this chapter is that the sacraments are not ours to reinvent. They belong to Christ and have been entrusted to His Church. The minister is a servant of the sacred mysteries, not their owner.

This matters because the decades after the Council often fostered an atmosphere in which ritual creativity was praised as pastoral sensitivity. Priests altered words, gestures, vessels, postures, and even sacramental matter. Committees sometimes treated the ancient signs of Catholic worship as obstacles in modern understanding. The sanctuary was made to resemble a stage, the celebrant became the center of attention, and the congregation was encouraged to measure participation by how many visible tasks it performed.

That mentality is incompatible with the Council's own teaching. Section 59 says the sacraments give worship to God. Section 63 requires approved rites under ecclesiastical authority. The Constitution had already taught in Section 22 that "no one, even if he be a priest," may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.

Signs That Teach Because They Are Sacred

The Council says that sacramental signs instruct. But a sign does not become more intelligible merely by becoming more ordinary. A baptismal font teaches because water truly washes and gives life. Sacred chrism teaches because anointing signifies consecration and strength. Kneeling teaches adoration. Silence teaches that a Mystery greater than our words is present. The confessional teaches that sin is real and forgiveness comes through Christ's appointed minister. Vestments teach that the priest acts in a sacred office, not as a private personality.

When such signs are reduced, flattened, or explained away, the result is not necessarily greater understanding. Often it is the opposite. The rite may become verbally busy while becoming symbolically poor.

The Church certainly desires that the faithful understand. But the goal is not to make the sacred common; it is to form the faithful so that they can enter the sacred. Catechesis must rise to the sacrament. The sacrament must not be lowered until nothing remains that needs explanation.

Baptism and the Recovery of Christian Initiation

The restoration of the adult catechumenate was a genuine recovery of an ancient and valuable practice. Conversion ordinarily requires time, instruction, testing, prayer, and gradual incorporation into the life of the Church. The modern restoration can help converts understand that Baptism is the death of the old life and birth into a new one.

Yet the Church must never allow a staged process to obscure the urgency or necessity of Baptism. Nor should pastoral programs turn initiation into a classroom course dominated by personalities and opinions. The catechumen is being prepared to renounce Satan, confess the Catholic Faith, receive sanctifying grace, and enter the one Church founded by Christ.

Infant Baptism likewise testifies that grace is gift before it is achievement. A child cannot earn divine adoption or explain it. God acts first. Parents and godparents therefore make serious promises: to raise the child in the Faith, teach prayer and doctrine, bring the child to Mass and Confession, and form him for eternal life. These promises must not become ceremonial words without consequences.

Confirmation Must Strengthen Catholics to Fight for the Faith

Confirmation is sometimes described vaguely as maturity, belonging, or choosing one's own faith. Those ideas are insufficient. Confirmation is first God's action. Through the sacramental seal, the Holy Ghost strengthens the baptized Christian to bear witness to Christ.

The confirmed Catholic is not commissioned to blend into the world. He is strengthened to confess the Faith when it is unpopular, to resist temptation, to defend truth, and, if necessary, to suffer for Christ. The traditional image of the Christian as a soldier of Christ should not be discarded merely because modern ears find it demanding.

Penance: The Sacrament That a Permissive Age Does Not Want

Section 72 calls for the nature and effect of Penance to be expressed more clearly. Yet in much of the postconciliar period, Confession nearly disappeared from ordinary Catholic life. Confessions lines shortened, scheduled hours diminished, communal penance services sometimes blurred the necessity of individual confession, and preaching about mortal sin, judgement, and Hell grew rare.

This cannot be celebrated as renewal. A reform that is pastorally fruitful should lead sinners more readily to repentance and absolution. If Catholics receive Holy Communion routinely but rarely confess, the Church must ask whether consciences have truly become purer – or whether the sense of sin has been lost.

Mercy does not mean telling man that sin is unimportant. Mercy means that Christ shed His Blood for sinners and still waits for them in the tribunal of Penance.

Anointing of the Sick and the Four Last Things

The Council rightly teaches that Anointing need not be delayed until the final moments. The sick should receive the sacrament while able to participate consciously. But widening its pastoral use must not empty it of its seriousness.

Illness places the Christian before the mystery of suffering, judgment, and eternity. The sacrament strengthens the soul, forgives sins under the conditions established by the Church, unites suffering to the Passion, and may restore bodily health if this serves salvation. When

death approaches, Confession, Anointing, the Apostolic Pardon, and Viaticum should be sought promptly.

The Church's ministry to the dying is not merely emotional comfort. It is preparation to meet God.

Holy Orders is Not Delegated Community Leadership

Holy Orders gives an indelible sacramental character. The ordained priest acts *in persona Christi Capitis* – in the person of Christ the Head – especially in offering the Holy Sacrifice and absolving sins. His priesthood differs in essence, not merely degree, from the common priesthood of the baptized.

The postconciliar desire to involve the laity has too often been accompanied by a practical blurring of the distinction. When lay people occupy roles proper to the sanctuary while priests assume the manner of discussion leaders, the faithful can lose sight of what ordination means. Clericalizing the laity impoverishes both the lay vocation and the ordained priesthood.

Matrimony is a Covenant Ordered to Fidelity and Life

The Council asks that the grace of Matrimony and the duties of the spouses be made clear. Those duties are not invented by the couple. Christian marriage is the exclusive, indissoluble union of one man and one woman, ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.

The liturgy must not reduce a wedding to a celebration of romantic feeling. The spouses promise fidelity until death. They accept sacrifice, permanence, openness to life, and responsibility for one another's salvation. Their consent makes the marriage; their life of grace sustains it.

In a culture of divorce, contraception, cohabitation, and confusion about the human person, Catholic marriage preparation must proclaim the truth plainly. Pastoral charity cannot be separated from truth.

Sacramentals and the Disenchantment of Catholic Life

The Council speaks beautifully of sanctifying "almost every event" of life. Yet one of the sad ironies of the postconciliar era is that many sacramentals vanished from ordinary Catholic experience. Blessings were shortened or rarely sought. Holy water fonts were sometimes left empty. Rogation processions, Ember Days, blessed candles, household blessings, prayers against storms, and other customs faded. Some revised blessings emphasized the people using an object while speaking less clearly of the object itself being blessed.

This was not demanded by Sections 59-82. The Council did not command Catholics to become embarrassed by blessed objects, sacred gestures, processions, exorcisms, or popular devotions. On the contrary, it teaches that the material world can be directed toward sanctification and the praise of God.

A recovery of sacramentals would help restore a Catholic imagination: a world in which the home, field, meal, journey, sickness, childbirth, labor, and death are all placed beneath the Cross of Christ.

Christian Burial: Hope Without Sentimental Canonization

Sections 81-82 ask that Christian funerals express the Paschal character of death. This means genuine Christian hope in the resurrection. It does not mean pretending that every deceased person is certainly already in Heaven.

The older Requiem tradition speaks with sobriety about judgment, mercy, purification, and the need to pray for the dead. In many modern funerals, however, white vestments, constant affirmations of “celebrating a life,” and informal eulogies can create the impression that the deceased has already been canonized. When that happens, the most loving act owed to the departed – prayer for the repose of the soul – is weakened.

Christian hope is stronger than sentiment because it faces the truth. Christ has conquered death; therefore we pray, offer Masses, gain indulgences, and entrust the dead to His mercy.

The Novus Ordo: We Must Speak Honestly

Although today’s chapter concerns the other sacraments and sacramentals, we cannot study the postconciliar rites without speaking honestly about the Novus Ordo and the broader liturgical reform that followed Vatican II.

First, we must state what is true: the Novus Ordo, when celebrated according to the Church’s intention with valid matter, form, and a validly ordained priest, is a valid Mass. Christ becomes truly present – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – and the Sacrifice of Calvary is made sacramentally present. But validity is not the only question we should ask.

A rite may be valid while legitimate questions remain about the prudence, its textual choices, its ritual expression, and the pastoral consequences of the way it was imposed and celebrated.

The Novus Ordo was not simply the old Roman Mass translated into English. It involved an extensive reconstruction: prayers were removed or altered; the Offertory was replaced; many options were introduced; new Eucharistic Prayers came into common use; the calendar and lectionary were substantially changed; and ritual gestures were simplified. In ordinary parish practice, Latin nearly vanished. Gregorian chant was displaced, celebration facing the people became nearly universal, altar rails disappeared. Communion in the hand became widespread, and lay extraordinary ministers began to be used.

Not all of these things were required by the Council. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* did not abolish Latin. It required that Latin be preserved while permitting a suitable use of the vernacular. It did not command the priest to face the people. It did not command Communion in the hand. It did not command the removal of altar rails or high altars. It did not authorize improvisation. It did not ask that Gregorian chant be replaced by music modeled on popular entertainment.

We should therefore refuse two false choices. We should not claim that Vatican II explicitly ordered the later changes. Nor do we have to pretend that every difficulty was merely an isolated “abuse” unrelated to the scale, speed, and principles of the reform itself.

There were genuine abuses, but there were also serious structural problems: the multiplication of options encouraged variation; simplified rites often communicated less clearly through gesture and text; the near-total vernacularization severed many Catholics from a sacred language shared across centuries and nations; and the dramatic practical shift toward a community-centered mode of celebration made it easier to experience the Mass as an assembly meal rather than the awesome Sacrifice of Christ offered to the Father.

The fruits cannot be ignored. After the reform, large portions of the Catholic world witnessed collapsing Mass attendance, disappearing vocations, widespread ignorance of the Real Presence, loss of Confession, casual reception of Holy Communion, and the destruction or disfigurement of sanctuaries. No single cause explains all of this, and honesty forbids simplistic arithmetic. The cultural revolution of the 1960s also did enormous damage. Yet honesty equally forbids us from declaring the reform a questionable pastoral triumph while refusing to examine the devastation that accompanied it.

The proper Catholic response is neither denial nor despair. It is fidelity. We judge every reform by the perennial Faith, the received tradition, and the good of souls. We insist that the sacred liturgy be God-centered, doctrinally unambiguous, reverent, and visibly continuous with the worship that formed the saints.

The traditional Roman liturgy remains the treasure of the Church. As Benedict XVI affirmed, the older Missal was never juridically abrogated. Catholics attached to it should not be treated as though love for the inherited worship of their fathers was a disease. Nor should anyone weaponize that love into contempt for the Church.

The path forward must include truth: truth about the Council, truth about what came afterward, truth about the real losses, and truth about the grace Christ continues to give. Authentic renewal will come through restoration of reverence, sacred silence, *ad orientem* worship, Latin, Gregorian chant, worthy reception of Holy Communion, frequent Confession, doctrinal preaching, and the freedom of the traditional Roman Mass to flourish.

The Standard is the Salvation of Souls

The final measure is not novelty, efficiency, popularity, or institutional self-defense. It is the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Do the rites communicate Catholic truth clearly? Do they lead souls to repentance? Do they deepen belief in the Real Presence? Do they produce vocations, reverence, sacrifice, and holiness? Do they help Catholics prepare for death and eternity?

Section 59 gives us the standard: sanctification, the building up of Christ’s Body, and the worship of God. Any authentic reform must serve all three.

VI. REFLECT

As we finish today's reading, ask yourself –

- Do I understand the sacraments primarily as actions of Christ, or merely as important religious ceremonies?
- Do I believe that the sacraments truly impart the grace they signify?
- Do I prepare myself to receive sacramental grace fruitfully through faith, repentance, prayer, and proper disposition?
- Have I ever treated a sacrament as an automatic ritual requiring no conversion of life?
- Have I ever reduced a sacrament to a symbol whose meaning comes chiefly from the community?
- Do the visible signs of Catholic worship help me recognize the invisible action of God?
- Am I grateful that God meets me as an embodied person through water, oil, touch, spoken words, bread, wine, and human gestures?
- Do I understand the difference between a sacrament instituted by Christ and a sacrament instituted by the Church?
- Do I use sacramentals with faith and prayer, or have I treated them superstitiously?
- Have I dismissed holy water, blessed objects, and the Church's blessings as unimportant remnants of the past?
- Is my home visibly and prayerfully Catholic?
- Do I invite the Church's blessing into the ordinary circumstances of my life?
- Do I see creation as God's gift leading me to Him, or have I allowed concern for nature to become detached from worship of the Creator?
- Do I understand the difference between using created things sacramentally and treating creation itself as sacred or divine?
- Can reverence for another culture ever justify using religious symbols that obscure or contradict the Catholic Faith?
- Do the outward signs used in Catholic worship clearly proclaim Jesus Christ as the one Lord and Savior?
- Have I become reluctant to recognize or name idolatry because doing so might be considered intolerant?
- How can I care responsibly for creation without speaking or acting as though the earth itself were divine?
- Do I understand Baptism as death and resurrection with Christ, forgiveness of sin, and entry into His Church?
- If I am a parent or godparent, have I taken my baptismal promises seriously?
- Do I help the children entrusted to me learn Catholic doctrine, prayer, reverence, and sacramental life?
- Do I recognize Confirmation as a sacrament of the Holy Spirit and Christian mission rather than a religious graduation?
- When did I last receive the sacrament of Penance?
- Have I allowed embarrassment, pride, routine, or loss of the sense of sin to keep me from Confession?
- Do I trust that Christ truly forgives through the absolution of the priest?
- Do I make an honest examination of conscience and a firm purpose of amendment?
- Would I know when to ask for the Anointing of the Sick for myself or someone I love?

- Have I waited too long to call a priest because I thought Anointing was only for the final moment before death?
- Do I pray for priests, bishops, deacons, and men preparing for Holy Orders?
- Do I understand ordination as a sacramental configuration to Christ rather than simply appointment to a Church job?
- Do I uphold the Catholic truth that marriage is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman, ordered to fidelity, holiness, and the gift of children?
- If I am married, do I see my daily sacrifices as part of the grace and vocation of Matrimony?
- Do I pray for religious vocations and for those who have consecrated their lives to God?
- When I attend a funeral, do I pray for the soul of the deceased, or do I simply assume that no prayer is needed?
- Do I allow Christian death to remind me of judgment, mercy, resurrection, and the need to be ready to meet God?
- Have I confused the text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* with every element of the later Novus Ordo or every practice that followed the Council?
- Can I distinguish the Council's explicit mandates from the judgments made during postconciliar implementation?
- Can I recognize legitimate reform and genuine fruits while also examining confusion, rupture, or loss honestly?

And perhaps the most important question:

- Is the grace I receive through the sacraments transforming the way I worship God, love the Church, practice charity, carry suffering, fulfill my vocation, and prepare for eternal life?

VII. DEEPER THOUGHTS TO CONCLUDE THIS DAY

Section 61 gives us an extraordinary vision: almost every event of human life can be sanctified through the Church's sacramental worship.

We live in a world that has become disenchanted. Water is only water. Oil is only oil. The body is treated as material to be used or redesigned. Marriage is treated as a temporary contract. Suffering is regarded as meaningless. Death is hidden, sentimentalized, or managed without hope. Daily work appears cut off from eternity.

The sacramental vision sees more deeply. Water can become the instrument of new birth. Oil can strengthen the confirmed, consecrate the ordained, and comfort the sick. Human words can become the form through which Christ forgives sins. The consent of a baptized man and woman can establish a sacramental covenant. The laying on of hands can communicate grace for sacred ministry. The suffering body can be joined to the wounded and risen Christ. The body laid in the grave can await resurrection.

This does not mean that creation is divine. It means that the Creator can use creation as His instrument. Grace does not destroy nature; it heals, elevates, and sanctifies it.

That truth should change how we live. If I am baptized, I belong to Christ. If I am confirmed, I have been strengthened to bear witness. If I have sinned, Christ waits for me in Penance. If I am sick, my suffering can be united to His Cross. If I am married, my home can become a school of sacrificial love. If I am ordained or consecrated, my life belongs publicly to the service of God and His Church. If I am dying, I do not travel alone. The Church accompanies me with absolution, anointing, Viaticum, prayer, and the hope of resurrection.

The question of liturgical reform therefore reaches far beyond aesthetic preference. Rites form the Catholic imagination. They teach us what the human person is, what the body is, what sin is, what marriage is, what suffering is, what death is, and what eternity is.

When the rites are celebrated with doctrinal clarity, reverence, beauty, and fidelity, they open the visible world toward heaven. When they become casual, improvised, sentimental, or centered upon ourselves, they can obscure the very mystery they are meant to reveal.

This is why the Church must guard her sacramental worship so carefully. She is guarding gifts that do not belong to one generation. She received them from Christ and must hand them on faithfully until He comes again.

The final measure of every reform – before the Council, at the Council, after the Council – is not whether it satisfies our faction, preference, or memory. The final measure is whether it serves the truth entrusted by Christ, gives glory to God, builds up His Church, sanctifies souls, and leads the faithful into the Paschal Mystery.

The sacramentals are God's gifts. We do not master them. We receive them. And through them, Christ receives us into His own life.

VIII. CLOSING PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest and Author of grace. You took flesh for our salvation and entrusted to Your Church the sacred mysteries by which we are born, strengthened, forgiven, healed, consecrated, united, and prepared for eternal life.

Give us living faith in Your sacraments. Protect us from treating them as empty ceremonies, social customs, private possessions, or merely human symbols. Protect us also from receiving them carelessly, mechanically, or without conversion of heart.

Through Holy Baptism, renew in us the grace of divine adoption. Help parents and godparents remain faithful to the promises they have made.

Through Confirmation, strengthen us by the Holy Spirit to confess the faith courageously and live as soldiers of Christ.

Through the sacrament of Penance, give us true contrition, honest confession, confidence in Your mercy, and a firm purpose of amendment.

Through the Anointing of the Sick, strengthen those who suffer, forgive their sins, give them courage, and unite them to Your saving Cross.

Bless our bishops, priests, and deacons. Keep them faithful to the grace of Holy Orders. Teach them to disappear behind the sacred office entrusted to them so that Your people may encounter You.

Bless all married couples. Preserve them in unity, fidelity, purity, patience, and openness to life. Make every Catholic home a place of prayer, sacrifice, forgiveness, and love.

Bless those consecrated to you in virginity and religious life. Let their offering shine as a sign of the world to come.

Teach us to use the sacramentals of the Church with faith rather than superstition. Through the Church's prayer, sanctify our homes, our work, our suffering, our journeys, our possessions, and the ordinary events of our days.

Remember the faithful departed. Purify them in Your mercy and bring them into the light of Your countenance. Comfort those who mourn, and keep before us the hour when we too must stand before You.

Give Your Church wisdom in every work of liturgical reform. Preserve all that faithfully hands on the apostolic faith. Purify what obscures the mystery. Heal every wound caused by irreverence, confusion, rupture, or abuse.

Grant that every celebration of the older Roman liturgy and every celebration of the Novus Ordo may be offered with fidelity, reverence, humility, and love, so that all attention is directed toward You.

Through every sacrament and sacramental, draw us more deeply into Your Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

And at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, receive us into the heavenly liturgy, where with Our Lady, the angels, the saints, and the whole Church triumphant, we shall praise the Father through You in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.
Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.