

Let's have a little morning pop quiz:

- How many sacraments are there? (2)
- There are 2, Baptism and Eucharist
- There are 5 Sacramental Rites: confirmation, ordination, holy matrimony, reconciliation of a penitent, unction
- BUT ONLY 2 sacraments.

These two are sacraments because Christ participated in both in his lifetime, and because each of them become a part of a Christian's spiritual life. They help us through our everyday existence.

One gives us a gift and a mission, the other gives us food for the mission.

The other 5 can be a part of our life, but aren't central -- the way Eucharist and Baptism are.

So what is the definition of a sacrament? You all should know this...I had to learn the answer when I was confirmed, and my students in confirmation have to learn it too. It's in the Catechism at the back of the prayer book.

Sacraments are an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace... The baptismal rite and the water within it are the outward sign of the inward and spiritual grace. But what is this spiritual grace?

First—let's define "Grace". Grace falls into what I like to call the category of "religious gobbledygook" words. Grace can mean anything and everything to the hearer-- and often does. But the word itself means Gift. Grace means gift.

So if the outward and spiritual sign is the rite of baptism, and the water used within it: what is the inward and spiritual grace- the inward and spiritual GIFT?

The inward and spiritual grace is something we already contain inside ourselves as a gift from God, and that is what the outward sign speaks to.

The “Grace” or Gift- is that we are already saved. Christ died once, for ALL, 2000 years ago. We have to do nothing to be saved. It is grace. A gift.

When we are baptized, we accept God’s gift.

Think of it this way: Let’s say you buy a gift for someone you love tremendously, you pay for the gift, you wrap the gift, you give the gift. It’s now up to the recipient of the gift to accept it—or I suppose--reject it. But the gift is still bought, paid for, wrapped and given.

Let’s say the one you love rejects your gift. Your heart is sore, all but broken, but still—you keep that gift safe, ready for the day the heart of the one you love will change, and the gift will be accepted.

Christ died so that we would know our sins are forgiven. We don’t need to do anything more. That is Christ’s gift to us.

But this gift is special. When we accept this gift, in baptism—something else happens: this knowledge of forgiveness makes us alive-- it wakes up our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills.

So we take a pledge, a vow, at Baptism-- not to just believe IN Christ, but FOLLOW Christ. We become part of a fellowship-- like that fellowship in Lord of the Rings. Remember that? All the people who agree to be part of the fellowship agree to do one thing—and to help each other do that one thing.

Well, our fellowship isn’t questing for a ring. We are questing for love: to be love, to support love, to follow where love leads.

Just love, you say? Where are the hardships? The dangers? The thrills?

If we can ask that—we haven’t really followed love. Have you ever tried to treat with love those the world tells you to hate? Have you ever vocally stood up in love for a particularly despised subset of society? It’s full of hardship. And sometimes danger.

Or, as GK Chesterton put it:

*“Following Christ’s path of love has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.”*

It’s easy to hate. Easy to go along with the current acceptability of making certain groups the enemies of the state. It’s easy to find fault with someone we haven’t even tried to understand. It’s easy- and even darkly thrilling to some—to bully, to revile, to turn our backs when people’s lives are at stake. It’s much harder to love. But our God is Love, and so loving IS evangelism.

And if we say we are followers of Christ and aren’t loving—aren’t even respecting the dignity of *every single human being*, we need to take a serious look at who it is we are evangelizing for. Because it’s not Christ.

If we’re not in this fellowship to quest for the power of love, Christ’s gift is still wrapped up for us somewhere. Not yet ready to be opened by us.

So as we affirm our Baptism today, let’s recommit to being on a quest to love. Let’s BE Jesus in the world. Let’s reflect Jesus’ fierce, loving, patient, funny, calmness. Radiate Christ’s mystical optimism. The world needs it so much.

And if you need nourishment while trying to follow and to love, there’s always the 2<sup>nd</sup> sacrament. Come to the table. The Spirit will give you the food you need to go back out into the world

And never be afraid to say that you’re a baptized follower of Jesus, the man who taught his followers to love everyone, to do justice and work for it, to love mercy and show mercy, and to take bread for the journey.

Go forth into the world, and be full of mystical optimism and strength.  
Amen.