

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read:

Christian initiation is accomplished by three sacraments together: Baptism which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciple with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ. (#1275)

Baptism is referred to as the first of the seven sacraments which gives access to the other sacraments. "It unites us with Christ who died for our sins and rose for our justification that 'we too might walk in newness of life.'" (Rom 6:4; cf. 4:25.) (CCC #977)

"Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission." (CCC #1213) Baptism is the action of God, that is, grace as God's first free eminent gift. Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. (Cf. Mk 16:16.) ... God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacrament. (#1257)

In an overview of the *General Directory for Catechesis*, (Origins April 2, 1998, Vol. 27, #41) Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, presents the connection of catechesis and the sacraments of initiation, especially Baptism. He calls Baptism "the sacrament of faith". The GDC itself states that,

the baptismal catechumenate constantly reminds the whole church of the fundamental importance of the function of initiation and basic factors which constitute it: catechesis and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The pastoral care of Christian initiation is vital for every particular Church. (#91)

It further affirms that "the baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community." (GDC #91) Indeed, "this Christian initiation...should not be left entirely to the priests and catechists, but should be the care of the entire community of the faithful." (*Decree on Church's Missionary Activity* #14)

Confirmation completes the grace of Baptism by a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which seal or confirm the Baptized in union with Christ. It equips them for active participation in the worship and apostolic life of the Church. In fact, as true witnesses of Christ they are "more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed." (CCC #1285, LG 11; cf. OC, Introduction 2.)

The Eucharist is the sum and substance of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." (CCC #1327; St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 4, 18, 5: PF 7/1, 1028.) The Eucharist is the principal Christian liturgical celebration by which the Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated and made present. "The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation." (CCC #1322) "The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life." (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* #11) It is at the heart of the Church's life. "By the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all." (CCC #1326; Cf. 1Cor. 15:28.) By receiving Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we celebrate our union with Jesus and other baptized members of the Church. Eucharist is the only Sacrament of Initiation that is received

over and over again. St. Thomas Aquinas captures a precise meaning of Eucharist in his prayer, *O Sacrum Convivium*. (*O Holy Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of His passion is renewed, our souls are filled with grace and the pledge of future glory is given us.*) At the same time Aquinas says that the Eucharist is a mystery whose meaning no theological explanation can hope to exhaust.

The three sacraments together lay the foundation of every Christian life. "The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life." (CCC #1212) To be initiated means to be admitted as a member and to bring into practice a way of life that "through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life." (CCC #1212)

Archdioceses of Cincinnati
Office of Evangelization and Catechesis
Sacraments for Young People - 2005