Sacraments in the post-Vatican II Church

The Way of celebrating
The Way of understanding

Sacraments and human life
- Birth → New birth in Christ
- Nourishment → Feeding on Christ
- Love → Sanctifying with God’s own love
- Service → Consecrated with the Spirit
- Sickness → Healing with prayer
- Sin → forgiveness and reconciliation
- Death → comfort and hope

Sacraments as process
- Birth → the journey of life
- Nourishment → learning and growth
- Love → creative friendship
- Service → care and affection
- Sickness → restoration or advance to community
- Sin → forgiveness as journey
- Death → grieving the passage

Sacramental Theology – A History
- Action first and then theology
- Homiletics before metaphysics
- Dual nature: human sign – divine grace
  - Augustine: human sign of divine grace
  - Scholastics: human sign that contains grace
  - Trent: human sign and divine grace
  - Baltimore: human sign that gives grace

Sacraments and Vatican II
- Vatican II recaptured that liturgy is “the work of the people.” It applied this term to all of the sacraments. Without the people in action, there can be no sacraments.
- Yet, sacraments are the work of God in and through the people. Without God working there can be no sacraments.

Liturgical remarks about sacraments in Vatican II:
- They require:
  - full and active participation of all the faithful
  - clear signification [complement to the scholastic concern.
  - sense of purpose of the rite [new twist on “rubrics”]
  - communal nature of the liturgy - not a private affair.
  - principle of adaptation - not a frozen affair.
Theological comments about sacraments in Vatican II

- Christological image: (S.C. 7) - "Christ always associates the Church with himself in this great work where God is perfectly glorified and men/women are sanctified.
- Christ is present in his church "to accomplish so great a work," word, presider/priest, assembly, food. accent on purpose, to accomplish so great a work.
- Human sanctification made manifest and accomplished through signs perceptible to the senses.
- Note on "ex opere operato"
- In the liturgy people "express in their lives and manifest to others," (a) mystery of the church and (b) nature of the church. This expression is (a) iconic and (b) dynamic. "work of our redemption is exercised."

Essential elements in Vatican II’s understanding of sacraments

- Christ is essential. Christ is the effective agent in all sacraments.
- Church is essential. Sacraments are ways in which the Church continues Christ’s work on the earth.
- Liturgical action is essential. Here the Church continues the work of Jesus, the worship of God and the salvation of all.

Trinitarian elements in Vatican II’s understanding of sacramental liturgy

- Role of God – Abba
- Role of Jesus – presence and agent.
  - present in Word
  - present in presider
  - present in the action that takes place
  - present in assembly gathered
- Role of the Spirit

Role of the presiding minister
- to present and represent Christ

Role of the Assembly
- to listen to the Word
- to respond
  - … in faith and prayer
  - … in action and communion

Who or what is sacrament?

- Christ - sacrament of encounter with God
- Church as sacrament of Christ
- Eucharist as sacrament of the Church
- Initiation into the Church – baptism, confirmation and communion
- Restoration to the Church – healing and penance
- Sacraments of the Church – marriage and orders

Sacrament as Memorial

- Jewish prayer – memory and hope
  - Whenever you do these things, you too will be brought out of the land of Egypt!
- Christian prayer – memory and hope
  - Whenever you do this, you too link yourself to Christ in his paschal journey.

The expectation in both is that God’s action in the past will once again happen to us who remember.
A text to capture "memorial"

- God said to Noah and to his sons with him: I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you.
- I set my bow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
- When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings.

(Gen 9:9-15)

To understand the fullness of memorial, four things are necessary:

- In memorial there must be something of God’s lead that is required.
- In memorial there must be a people “giving over to what God has asked”
- In memorial there must be something that signals God’s deliverance, “God fulfilling God’s promise
- In memorial there must be something required of the people: that they do something to become one with “God’s people.”

Memorial (memory and hope) in Jewish faith and prayer

- Prime example: The Passover
  - Tell the story
  - Offer the lamb
  - Cover the posts
  - Become God’s people

Eucharist as memorial – “Do this in memory of me”

- The classic categories
  - Word
  - Offertory
  - Consecration
  - Communion

Initiation into the Church

- Initiation follows this same pattern
  - Catechumenate → Word
  - Baptism → Offertory
  - Confirmation → Consecration
  - Communion → Communion

The healing sacraments

- Pastoral care of the Sick
  - Word
  - Silent prayer
  - Prayer and Anointing
  - Restoration

- Reconciliation
  - Word
  - Confession
  - Absolution

- *Restoration to either the Church here on earth or to the Church in heaven
Sacraments of vocation

- **Marriage**
  - Word
  - Exchange of vows
  - Nuptial blessing
  - A sacramental life
- **Orders**
  - Word
  - Commitment
  - Consecration
  - A ministerial life

- Marriage and Orders also follow the paths of initiation

In the sacramental life, the Eucharist is central!

Some questions at this point:

- If you went to confession every week for 6 months before feeling some sense of forgiveness, how often have you received the sacrament?
- When does a married couple become the sacrament of the church?
- Can a lay person anoint another who is sick?
- Answer a woman who had a miscarriage where her child is?
- When does a child first meet Jesus?
- And what of confirmation?
- Why not anoint a person who is already dead?