

“...those who repent of their sins, may confess them to God in the presence of a priest, and receive the assurance of pardon and the grace of absolution.” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993) In John 20:21-23, we see this authority being given to the disciples, as Jesus appeared to them, and breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus told them in verse 23, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” It is with this authority therefore that a priest has the authority to grant pardon and forgiveness of the sins of a penitent person. All that God requires is humility when we sin. 1st John 1:8 – 9, tells us of God’s grace, if we acknowledge when we have sin, and ask God to forgive us. God’s love is such that God is always willing to forgive. The outward sign of Confession and absolution is “the extension of hands and words of absolution pronounced by the priest” (*A Guide to the Sacrament of Penance*, 2002), while the inward and spiritual grace that one receives from this sacrament is the assurance of sins forgiven, God’s bountiful grace/love, and the conviction of being restored to the fold as a child of God.

Holy Unction/Anointing the Sick (Mark 16:1 – 3; James 5:14 – 15)

“The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, or Holy Unction as it is also known, reminds us that when we are in pain, either physical, emotional, or spiritual, Christ is present with us through the ministry of His Church. He is among us to offer strength to meet the challenges of life, and even the approach of death.” (*The Sacrament of Holy Unction*, n.d.).

Holy Unction is a sacrament of the Church in which the priest uses consecrated oil (Oil of the Infirm) to make the sign of the cross either on the forehead or other parts of a person’s body who is sick (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993). This concept is seen in James 5:14-15, which states, “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.” From this text, one can see that the tradition of elders in the Early Church being asked to go and anoint the sick is a practice which continues today. It should be noted too, that anointing was not only for the sick, but even for the forgiveness of sins. This therefore shows that health is not only limited to the physical body, but it even applies to the soul.

Consequently, while the outward and visible sign of this sacrament is the anointing of the individual with consecrated oil by the priest, one can appreciate that the inward and spiritual grace of God being expressed is

the healing of spirit, mind and body. Holy Unction therefore demonstrates that God is not only concerned about the physical body, but the spiritual and emotional as well.

Christian Marriage (Genesis 2:23-24)

Christian Marriage is a sacrament of the Church into which a woman and a man in Christ enter into a lifelong union with each other, via the making of vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessings of God to help them fulfil their vows to each other (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993). In Genesis 2:23-24, we see the first marriage recorded in the Bible being performed in the Garden of Eden. Here we see that they should come together, and become one flesh. This is a demonstration of the cohesiveness which is expected when two persons come together as a result of a marriage. They should seek to understand and respect each other so that they can live together in harmony.

Also, a Christian marriage is recognized as being between one woman and one man, in which the outward and visible sign is the ring. The ring is a complete circle; it has no end. The inward and spiritual grace extended, therefore, by God through this sacrament, is the unending love and faithfulness that the couple should have between them. The ring should therefore remind them of the vows and covenant that they have made with each other, as they live together as one.

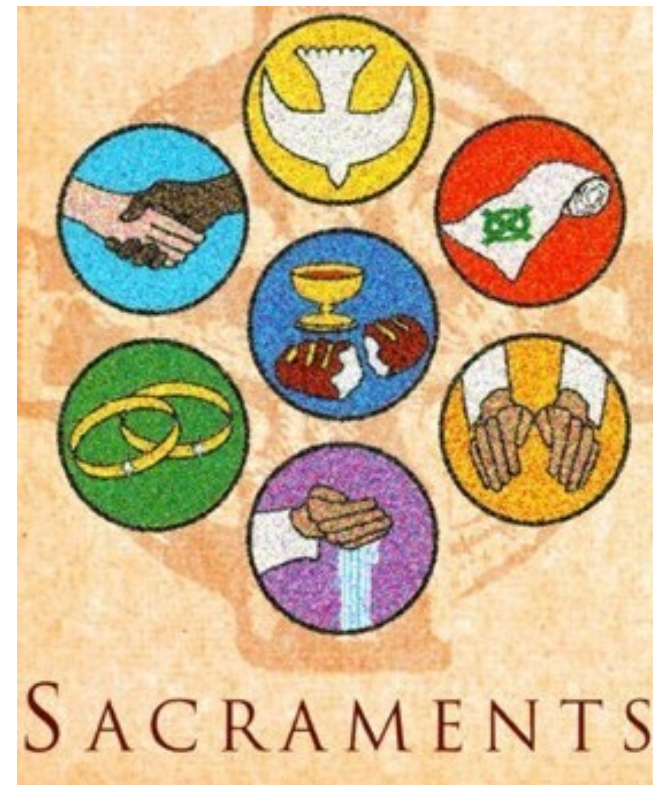
Conclusion

As Anglicans, it is very important that we value and appreciate all seven sacraments of the Church, as they are very important in facilitating our growth and union with Christ and each other. With each of these sacraments having one or more outward and visible signs, one can better appreciate the inward transformation that is taking place in our lives, whenever we participate in any of them. Through these sacraments, we are led to experience the outpouring of God’s grace and goodness in our lives, thus causing us to recognize how much God loves us in spite of our own faults and imperfection.

References

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The Seven Sacraments of the Church





Sacraments of the Church

What is a Sacrament?

“A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993). The *Book of Common Prayer* (1993) further explains that This grace may be defined as God’s favour towards us. It is unearned and undeserved. In other words, because of God’s bountiful love for us, we do not need to do anything to get this love. It is therefore because of this grace, why “God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our heart and strengthens our wills”.

Unlike some churches, that recognize only two sacraments, (**Holy Baptism and Holy Communion**), the Anglican Church recognizes seven (7). It should however be pointed out that as Anglicans, we consider Holy Baptism and Holy Communion “as the greatest sacraments given by Christ to His Church, as recorded in the gospels...” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993). In addition to these two sacraments, the other five are **Confirmation, Ordination, Confession & Absolution, Christian Marriage, and Holy Unction** (Anointing of the sick with oil). Even though these may not be recorded in the gospels, in which Jesus actually instructed His followers to do them, they are recorded in scripture, especially those associated with the establishment of the early church, wherein these practices were used/encouraged to promote the actions of God in the lives of Christ’s followers through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Each Sacrament therefore demonstrates how God’s grace may be outpoured in our lives as a people, as we seek to exercise ministry as a Church. So, through these sacraments, people can receive forgiveness of their sins, be healed in body mind and spirit, enlightened and strengthened to do God’s will, and be challenged to turn from evil and do good. This is further aided by the fact that each sacrament has an outward and visible component (sign), which helps us to understand/appreciate the inward and spiritual grace (God’s transforming love) that is taking place within.

Sacraments therefore make God’s people holy, as they help us as a Church to be united with Jesus, via the love that He shares with us. Such love demonstrates a desire to care for God’s people, in spite of who we are and what we do. This undeserved love, provided through the sacraments, guides our hearts to do what is right and pleasing to God; it strengthens and directs us in our journey with God, and it helps us to be restored to God and each other (via receiving God’s forgiveness) when we falter along the way.

Holy Baptism (Matt. 3:13-17, Matt. 28:16-20 & Mark 1:9-11)

Holy Baptism may be defined as the sacrament of the church, “...by which Christ adopts us as His children and makes us members of Christ’s Body and, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.” As seen in Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus was baptized by John in River Jordan, and consequently, we as followers of Jesus are encouraged to do likewise. The outward and visible sign of Baptism is water. The use of water is important, as its use is one which makes objects clean. Consequently, the inward and spiritual change/grace which is derived from baptism is that we are cleansed (forgiven) of our sins, given new life in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and we are also united with Christ in both His death and resurrection (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993).

Holy Communion (Matt. 26:17–29 & 1 Cor. 11:23–25)

The sacrament of Holy Communion is the other great sacrament of the church. In Matthew 26:17-29, we see Jesus instituting this sacrament on the night he was betrayed. This sacrament may be defined as “...the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of His life, death and resurrection, until His coming again.” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993) The outward and visible sign in Holy Communion is consecrated bread and wine (received by faith), while the inward and spiritual grace received is the body and blood of Christ, which is received in faith. This for us as Christians is important, as through this great sacrament we receive forgiveness of our sins, strength in our union with Christ and each other, while being nourished and sustained by Him in eternal life (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993).

Confirmation (Acts 9:17)

The rite of confirmation is a sacrament of the Church in which a mature commitment to Christ is made, and the candidate receives strength by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, via prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993). This is a practice of the early church, as seen in Acts 9:17, in which Ananias laid hands on Saul, and he received the Holy Spirit and restoration of his sight. The outward and visible sign of confirmation, is therefore the laying on of hands by the bishop. When this is done, it is important to note that it is not that the person has received the Holy Spirit, as we all have the Holy Spirit (God’s power at work in our lives) within us, as he/she already has the Holy Spirit within them. It is no wonder therefore that the inward and spiritual grace of confirmation is that through prayer, we are empowered by

God to make mature decisions, especially as it relates to our relationship with God and each other. If we were baptized as infants, godparents and parents were charged with the mandate of nurturing us in our spiritual development, and ensuring that we are brought to the bishop to be confirmed later in life. At this stage therefore, the candidate being confirmed, having attended classes based on the catechism, should now be mature enough to make responsible and godly decisions on his/her own. One can therefore appreciate the importance of them needing to be strengthened in the faith, as they now face the challenges that life has to offer.

Ordination (Acts 13:1 -3)

Ordination is a sacrament of the Church in which “...God gives authority and grace of the Holy Spirit to those being made bishops, priests and deacons through prayer and the laying on of hands by the bishop.” A Biblical text of such a commissioning being done is found in Acts 13:1 -3, in which Saul and Barnabas were set apart to do the work of God. After fasting and praying, hands were laid on them after which they were sent on their way. The outward and visible sign of ordination is not only the laying on of hands (for both priests and deacons), but also the anointing of the palms with the Holy Chrism (priests and bishops), the reception of the New Testament (for Deacons) and a Bible (for priests), and the reception of a chalice and paten (for priests). For a bishop, it would involve the reception of a crosier as a symbol of his apostolic mission to proclaim the Word of God, the ring (as the bride of Christ) and the mitre (a sign of the bishop’s authority). All these are symbols, (which include others not mentioned) that are associated with the specific office to which an individual is being ordained.

Consequently, one can see therefore that the inward and spiritual grace surrounds that of representing Christ and His Church, in which the deacon is called to proclaim the Word and serve the people; the priest is called to share with the bishop in overseeing the Church, be a pastor of the people, to proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments of the church, and to grant pardon to the people in the name of God. The Bishop however is the chief pastor of a diocese, who safeguards the faith, unity and discipline of the whole Church; he/she also proclaims the Word of God, facilitates reconciliation, builds up the church and ordains others to continue the ministry of Christ (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1993).

Confession & Absolution (John 20:21-23; 1 John 1:8-9)

The rite of confession and absolution (also known as Penance) is a sacrament of the church in which