



RESTORED ORDER: Sacraments of Initiation

By Father Daren J. Zehnle

Sharing in the Life of Christ

Many centuries ago, Pope St. Leo the Great wisely said that “what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries” (Sermon 74.2). He spoke these words concerning the ascension of Christ and in this way referred to the relationship between the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus and the Sacraments of his Body, the Catholic Church.

Throughout his public ministry, the Savior “went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). He healed the sick, forgave sins and raised the dead. And, what is more, in order that his mission and ministry might not cease with his ascension to the right hand of the Father, he entrusted his same mission and ministry to the Apostles so that through them the sick would be healed, sins forgiven, and the dead raised to life. In this way, what was visible in the Savior — his gestures, actions, and in a certain sense, his words — passed over into his mysteries. This is why St. Paul says, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Corinthians 4:1). What are these

mysteries of which he speaks?

When St. Paul wrote his letters, he wrote in Greek, and so he used the word *mysterion*, which has as its root the meaning “to close or shut the mouth.” They are called mysteries not because they are unknown, but because in the presence of them man ought to be speechless; he ought to close his mouth — to be silent — in wondrous love.

It was the early Latin writer Tertullian who first spoke of a mystery of Christ as a *sacramentum*. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out that “the term *sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation which was indicated by the term *mysterium*” (art. 774). If we reflect on the use of these two terms, each with their different emphases, we can see that “the saving work of [Jesus’] holy and sanctifying humanity is the sacrament of salvation, which is revealed and active in the Church’s sacraments (which are the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the Church which is his Body)” (art. 774).

The sacraments, then, are not so

much about the person receiving them as much as they are about Christ Jesus and his merciful love which he so generously shares with us. It is through the sacraments that his life, mission and ministry remain present with us today, here in central Illinois nearly two thousand years after his ascension.

As we in this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois begin our transition toward the restoration of the original order of the sacraments of initiation, many people have asked important questions about the rationale behind this recommendation of the fourth diocesan synod, which Bishop Thomas John Paprocki accepted and decreed. It is my hope to be able to address some of these questions in a series of articles published here in the *Catholic Times* over the coming weeks. If we establish the life of the Lord Jesus and his desire to share his life with us as the central aspect of our understanding of the sacraments, we will have a solid foundation on which to build our understanding of the restoration of the original order of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the holy Eucharist. ✠

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Frequently asked questions

Q. What are the sacraments of initiation?

A. The sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist are interrelated and all three are required for full Christian initiation. The Christian is born anew by baptism, strengthened by confirmation and fed by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist.