

SACRAMENTS

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Americans created public sacraments of healing. People put up photos and names of loved ones on fences. A cross-shaped, ruined steel girder became a symbol of the suffering of those who lost their lives and of those who lost loved ones.



Reuters pictures

For Catholics, the world is sacramental. All creation reveals God and makes God visible. An ancient redwood, a new baby can awaken us to awe at God's presence in creation. At such moments the tree or the child are signs or sacraments of God's continuous, creative presence within and around us.

Signs point beyond what we see to what we don't see. They open us to the transcendent mystery of God's creative, sustaining love in which we live.

Jesus is the sacrament of God. Jesus makes God visible. We see in Jesus how God acts as one of us. Jesus reveals every person's capacity to love, forgive, share, serve, heal, and reach out to outsiders as he did.

The Church celebrates seven sacraments to continue Jesus' loving, healing actions among us. In the sacraments we remember, celebrate, and express our faith in Jesus' actions. In these actions we find our identity as Christians.

Before he died, Jesus made bread broken and shared and wine poured out the signs of his love for us, the visible sacrament of his total self-giving on the cross and the new life of his resurrection.

The Church remembers Jesus and celebrates eucharist to become what we celebrate—a holy community in communion with God and one another. As a community, the Church is a sign that points to the unity to which the Creator calls us, Jesus leads us, the Holy Spirit inspires us, and human race reaches. The Church celebrates the sacraments to become what we celebrate—a believing, forgiving people, the body of Christ in our world.

Make a public memorial that celebrates Jesus' significance for us today.

How Do We Remember?



Reuters pictures

The September 11 Memorial creates a permanent sacrament of healing and remembering. Families who lost loved ones find their names among the 3,000 etched deeply into the granite square that surrounds Ground Zero. Water flows down the four sides of the memorial. The place feels somber. Visitors walk the perimeter and honor the dead with flags and flowers.



Friends create a memorial at the site where a young man was murdered.

People use notes, flowers, and running shoes to express support for victims of the Boston Marathon bombing.



iStock photo

We Share the **FAITH** of a Community

In the sacraments, the Church celebrates its faith in the continuing, life-giving power of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus continues to welcome, bless, heal, feed, forgive, and unite us in the sacraments. Sacraments use visible signs and audible prayers and stories to make this invisible mystery of faith present. Just as the girder cross makes visible what happened on 9/11, so the sacraments make visible what happened for us in Jesus' death and resurrection.

The signs of the Church's sacraments come from the created world: bathing in water, soothing and strengthening with oil, eating bread, sharing wine, laying on hands. These actions remember Jesus' healing, freeing actions when he was alive. Sacraments celebrate our faith in Jesus and our faith that God is always and everywhere creatively present.

Three sacraments—baptism, confirmation, and eucharist—initiate

Christians into the mystery of Jesus' death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit. Each of these sacraments has an action sign in which the Christian participates. We wash in the waters of Jesus' new

risen life. A baptism is a christening, a "Christing" that marks us with an indelible character, a lasting belonging to Christ that calls us to holiness. In putting on white robes, new Christians put on Christ and his way of life.

By laying on hands and anointing with oil in confirmation, the bishop seals new Christians with the gift of the Spirit. At eucharist Christians gather as a community to eat the bread and drink the cup which Jesus made signs of his love.

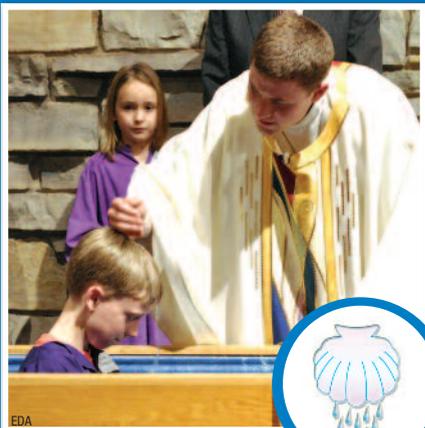
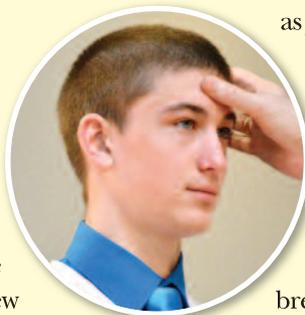
At Mass the community gathers around two tables to remember and celebrate Jesus. At the table of the word, we nourish our memory with stories of God's goodness to us and Jesus' vision for us. Around the table of the eucharist we share the body and blood of Christ. We do as Jesus commanded, "Do this to remember me." We do this often to recognize and become who we are—the body of Christ in our world. Eucharist is the daily bread of Christians, our

regular family meal that nourishes us with God's word and the body and blood of Christ. Celebrating eucharist gathers and forms us as a community. We bring gifts of bread and wine to the altar. The priest prays that the Holy Spirit come upon these gifts and make them holy. With the bread and wine we are the gifts the Spirit makes holy.

Every time we eat the bread that is the Body of Christ, we nourish our commitment to give Jesus hands, feet, and heart in the world. Every time we drink the cup that is the

Blood of Christ, we pledge to give ourselves in service as Jesus did.

Two sacraments celebrate and continue Jesus' healing actions—reconciliation and anointing of the sick. Marriage and holy orders are sacraments of service that celebrate the upbuilding of the community. In marriage a man and woman pledge their love for each other and vow to be faithful to the other all their lives. Their lasting love makes Christian love visible among us. In holy orders the Christian community ordains ministers to serve the people, preach the gospel, and celebrate the sacraments.



INITIATION

We Become the **BODY OF CHRIST**



Liturgy is the Church's public prayer. Our life of public prayer as Catholic Christians revolves around the sacraments with the Eucharist at the center. The word *eucharist* in Greek means *to give thanks*.

Eucharist is the great thanksgiving prayer of the Christian community. In this sacrament Christians celebrate the faith we profess and live. The sign calls and gives us the power to become bread broken to nourish others and wine poured out in service.

Eucharist calls Christians to become the sacrament we celebrate. We share the body of Christ in order to become the body of Christ in the

world. Each Eucharistic Prayer is a great thanksgiving in which we pray to become like Jesus, an everlasting gift to God and our neighbor.

Eucharist is the ordinary way Catholics seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God unless we have committed serious sin. We hear in the gospel Jesus challenge us to live and love as he did. We remember with the priest in the Eucharistic Prayer

Jesus' actions on the night before he died, making bread and wine the signs of his love for us. During our lifetimes, celebrating eucharist transforms us into Christ. Many ways to pray center around Eucharist.

- **Every Eucharistic Prayer follows a pattern we can use for personal prayer. In every Eucharistic Prayer we remember and thank God for all God has done in the past—in history and in our lives. After the priest remembers and reenacts Jesus' actions at the last supper, we pray that in our future we may become one. To use this pattern for personal prayer, thank God for past blessings**

and then ask to become one Spirit in Christ and imagine the just, holy, united world that is our future hope.

- **Participate in celebrating Sunday Eucharist. Sing. Become a server or minister of hospitality.**
- **Participate in celebrating daily Mass.**
- **Reflect on the Sunday scripture readings with a group. Explore together what Jesus asks of us today in the gospels.**
- **Take time for prayer and solitude before the Blessed Sacrament.**

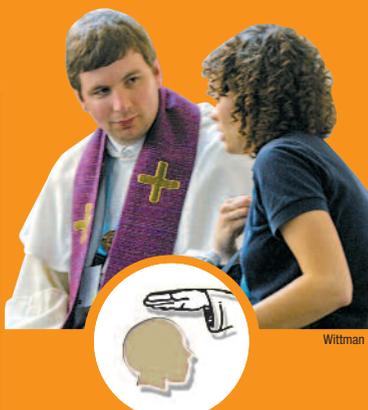
Through him, with him, in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours for ever and ever. Amen.



CREATE A SACRAMENT LIFELINE

The Church's seven sacraments celebrate special life moments—birth, family meals, marriage, forgiveness, sickness, commitment to serve. In the actions the sacraments celebrate, Jesus still acts among us.

Personalize the sacrament lifeline. Identify when you and other family members have celebrated these sacraments. Jot down special memories.



HEALING

SERVICE

We Become the Communion of SAINTS

The community of faith to which every baptized Christian belongs includes not only the living, but the dead. We believe in the communion of saints, the lasting union of all believers in God. The practice of giving a child a saint's name or a family member's name at baptism or

of taking a new name at confirmation is a way of taking a member of the communion of saints as a model. Whenever and wherever Christians down the ages have given their lives in martyrdom and service, they have changed others and called them to follow their example.

In Penny Lernoux's book *People of God*, she tells the story of five Indian catechists whose deaths have kept faith alive among those in whose places they died. Their story shows how we live in communion with saints, and how their examples help inspire and change us.

**Lucas,
Justo,
Angel,
Domingo,
Juan**



In the misty highlands of northwestern Guatemala there thrives a strange and wondrous church. Most of its members are illiterate Indian peasants.

“Every village in this region of El Quiche has a blood story to tell. During an eight-year reign of terror that did not begin to subside until a civilian president took office in 1986, thousands of Indians were killed or relocated to concentration camps. Persecution against the Catholic Church was so ferocious that not a single priest or nun remained in the Quiche diocese. In order to celebrate Communion, undercover catechists traveled hours on foot, carrying consecrated hosts hidden among ears of corn or in baskets of beans or tortillas. Anyone caught with such ‘subversive material’ could expect a slow death by torture. Yet the people kept faith.

“Typical of Quiche’s ‘church of the catacombs’ were the five catechists of Santa Cruz El Quiche—Lucas, Justo, Angel, Domingo, and Juan—who gave

their lives for their people.

“One day in 1982, Santa Cruz, a small market town north of Chichicastenango, was taken over by the army. The villagers were assembled and told that the catechists were ‘subversives’ whom their relatives must kill that very night. Otherwise, the army would raze Santa Cruz and neighboring villages. The soldiers considered the bible which the catechists taught subversive because it taught that everyone was equal in the sight of God.

“The villagers had refused to do the deed, but the five catechists insisted that they must: ‘It is better for us to die than for thousands to die.’ At 4:00 A.M. a weeping

procession, led by the catechists, arrived at the cemetery. Graves were dug, the people formed a circle around the kneeling men, and relatives of the five drew their machetes. Many could not watch the scene; some fainted as the blades fell, and the executioners’ tears mingled with the blood of the catechists. The villagers returned home in silence.”

“This plan did not eliminate another source of subversion. The people honored such martyrdom. ‘We remember them with holy reverence,’ said a witness to the catechists’ deaths, ‘because it is thanks to them that we are alive today.’ Life, explained a young Guatemalan, is meaningless ‘unless you give it away.’ In such a community of faith people fear not death, but infidelity to one another and to their beliefs.”

● **What relationship between Christians, living and dead, does this story show?**

Why Do I Belong?

Our baptismal and confirmation names may connect us with family members, saints of the past, or people of conscience in our times. Many saints would make headlines as leaders today. Melanie set free hundreds of her wealthy family’s slaves. Elizabeth gave away her husband’s wealth to feed the poor in Hungary. Martin de Porres and Damien cared for

sick people no one wanted to touch. John Bosco taught street kids.

- **What name do you want to take as your confirmation name? Why?**
- **What reasons do you see for belonging to the Christian community?**
- **Why contribute your gifts to its life?**