

Sacramental Living

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ~ Romans 12:2

THE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST is called to a completely new way of life. To live this new life, we must stay close to him. Christ said to his apostles, and to all that would follow him, *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing”* (Jn 15:4-5).

There are three primary ways that we “abide” in Christ: 1) personal prayer, 2) reading Sacred Scripture and applying it to our lives, and 3) sacramental living.

“Sacramental living” simply means the living out of a normal Catholic spiritual life; a life within the Church in which the Christian fulfills his or her vocation. Those who live a sacramental life will abide in Christ. They will remain connected to the True Vine by being connected to the sacraments he gave us. Frequent reception of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation; for those married, living, day by day, the sacrament of Holy Matrimony; and reverence for the sacred priesthood are essential elements of sacramental living. Those who pray and form their minds and hearts with the Holy Scriptures, Catholic teaching, and the liturgical life of the Church acquire a sacramental outlook on life, a Catholic worldview.

Frequent Reception of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Holy Mother Church, in her maternal solicitude for

the spiritual welfare of her children, obliges Catholics to attend Mass every Sunday (or Saturday evening to fulfill the Sunday obligation) and all holy days of obligation. For the same reason, she requires reception of the Holy Eucharist at least once a year, during the Easter season. However, a Catholic should make every effort to receive our Lord at Sunday Mass; only having not been absolved from mortal sin or failure to observe the requirements to fast should prevent the faithful Catholic from approaching the altar. In addition to the Sunday obligation, the Church encourages the faithful to go to Holy Mass frequently, even daily if possible. Jesus said, *“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”* (Jn 6:56). Jesus is the Bread of Life who nourishes our hungry souls. He invites us to receive frequently.

One should go to meet Christ in the sacrament of Reconciliation approximately monthly. However, if mortal sin is involved, one should go as soon as possible, making an appointment with a priest if the sacrament is not immediately available on a scheduled basis. We must also recall that it is not only absolution from our sins that we receive in the sacrament of Reconciliation. We also receive God’s grace to help

us change and avoid falling into the same sins in the future. A person struggling with a particular sin might wish to confess that sin oftener than monthly. Making good use of the help of the grace of this sacrament helps in overcoming troubling areas of sin and vice.

Living the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

For those who are married, sacra-

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mental living means to consciously and to daily draw upon the graces of the sacrament of Matrimony. To live as a Christian family in today's culture requires husband and wife to stay close to Christ, so that they can be effective channels of grace to each other. They must commit themselves to personal prayer, to praying together, and to encouraging one another to holiness through prayer and gentle encouragement. Parents and children should pray together on a daily basis; it is especially desirable to initiate children into praying the Holy Rosary within family prayer time. A husband or wife who finds himself or herself in a situation where the spouse is neglecting to do his or her part must surrender it to God in prayer. During difficult periods, the help of a wise priest or Christian marriage counselor can be very beneficial.

Reverence for the Sacred Priesthood

By the power of God in the sacrament of Holy Orders, every priest brings the presence of Christ into our daily lives, despite their human frailties. Through the ministry of the priest, the Lord brings souls into the Church, fills us with the Holy Spirit, feeds us with his holy Body and Blood, absolves us from our sins, and offers physical and spiritual healing to the sick. We can only respond with awe and with profound gratitude for what the Lord accomplishes in and through the sacred priesthood.

A Sacramental Outlook on Life, or a Catholic Worldview

Having a sacramental outlook means seeing the whole of life through Catholic lenses. Developing a Catholic worldview does not occur overnight. We must develop the habit of personal prayer, form our minds and hearts by reading and meditating on Sacred Scriptures and on the lives and writings of the

saints, more deeply understand Catholic teaching, and immerse ourselves in the liturgical life of the Church.

There are some very practical ways that we can foster a sacramental outlook. First, we can follow the Church's liturgical seasons in our personal prayer and in our family lives. The Liturgy of the Hours, even a shortened form, helps to structure each day and season. There are also many practices and customs that keep the liturgical year: Advent wreaths, Christmas stables, Lenten fasts and sacrifices, Easter eggs (signs of new life). Numerous books offer specific suggestions, along with ways to celebrate, for example, specific saints' feast days.

Second, we can participate in liturgical and extra-liturgical devotions, especially adoration of the Blessed

Sacrament. The Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist must be at the very center of our devotional life. Regular adoration of the Lord Jesus, either alone in a Eucharistic chapel or in prayer groups gathered before the Blessed Sacrament, leads to measurable spiritual growth. Other devotions in-

clude, for example, processions on the Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord (Corpus Christi), May processions to place a floral crown on a statue of Our Lady, the Stations of the Cross during Lent, and communal recitations of the Holy Rosary.

Central to Christian maturity and this sacramental outlook is the renewal of our thinking and attitudes. The more we see things as God sees them, the easier it is to recognize his will and follow it. As we pray, read the Sacred Scriptures, and seek to live a sacramental life, the Holy Spirit will renew our minds and help us to see everything through truly Catholic eyes.

(CCC 1076, 1083-1084, 1088, 1166-1167, 1171-1178, 1324, 1374, 1378-1382, 1384-1389, 1391-1398, 1457-1458, 1674-1676, 2030, 2042, 2685, 2689, 2691, 2708)

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A military chaplain celebrating Mass on the wing of an Air Force jet

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