

OCTOBER 29, 2023: 30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



Last week we began looking at how God builds us a home through the sacraments. We laid the foundation: all the sacraments come from God and they open us to experience the Paschal Mystery (Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and its consummation in Pentecost). Next, we framed the house and recognized that God uses the very elements of creation to speak to us through the sacraments. We can now move forward in building our home in Christ.

Now that we have the framing in place, we are ready to put up the exterior walls. We know where the sacraments come from, what they are, and how they work. But

we might wonder—what are the gifts we receive from the sacraments? The question we might then ask is, how do the sacraments impact our lives? We believe that the sacraments are an instrumental cause of grace. What does that mean? It means that God and God alone is the principle cause of grace, and the sacraments “work” because God chooses to act through them. It is like this: I, right now, am typing this article into my computer. The computer keyboard is the instrumental cause that allows my thoughts and words to be entered into a document. The keyboard cannot accomplish this on its own; if I do not type the words, nothing would happen. Therefore, I am the principal cause for what is being written and the meaning it conveys. The sacraments work in exactly the same way. God chooses to use water and the baptismal formula to baptize. The sacraments are not magic; they work because God created them for this purpose. We are simply following God's intentions and fulfilling his wishes. Like Christ, through the Paschal Mystery, we participate in the sacraments as a way of saying ‘yes’ to God. When we are open to saying ‘yes’ to God, we will be transformed by his grace. The transformation we experience within ourselves should then lead to living our lives in a different way.

Every time we encounter God, we are being called by Him to a deeper relationship. God's call demands a response. And that response should *not* simply be the words we say, but should be reflected in the way we live our life. That is why certain sacraments go beyond simply offering us grace. They actually mark our very souls. They give us what is called a character. The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders change our very soul. They mark us *not* just for life, but for eternity. And each one in its own way calls us to live a life that is centered not only in Christ, but in the proper worship of God. When we are baptized we are granted both a right and duty to worship God. But we do not get to decide how that worship is accomplished. Instead, we conform ourselves to how Christ worships God and unite ourselves to that same worship, i.e., the sacraments. By the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, Confirmation both strengthens that call and empowers us to become even more closely conformed to Christ. Those called to Holy Orders are intended to lead Christians to join together in proper worship. All of this works because of what God does for us in the sacraments.

We now see our complete dependence on God where the sacraments and life itself are concerned. But we do need to understand our role in the sacraments, both as minister and participants. So, now we are ready to put the roof on our home. We need to ask, what is our role in this wondrous gift? We do not do the sacraments: they are *not* our actions to start or even to complete. Rather, they are always an action of Christ in which we participate and cooperate with God's will for us. Christ is the only one who can give perfect worship to the Father, but we are also called to that perfect worship. And the only way we can do that is to be united with the actions of Christ. Ultimately, Christ is trying to get us to heaven. He desires that we all become saints. The sacraments are a gift God gives us to help make this possible. Through the sacraments we become one with Christ and unite the purpose of our hearts and lives to Jesus. This should lead us to the life Christ desires each of us to live. It is about a life of conversion, where our greatest desire is to grow and deepen our relationship with Christ. This is possible through the grace God offers us in the sacraments. It is also important to understand that even though grace is always available through the sacraments, grace may not always be given. We must be open to worthily receive the sacraments. In other words, we need to be in a state of grace and truly open to God acting in our lives. God will never force himself upon a person. And, as such, the person must be properly disposed to respond to God acting in their life. Hence, whether the sacraments are fruitful or not depends solely on the recipient; whether grace is available or not remains solely up to God.

As God is the principal cause of grace, we also believe that Christ is the primary minister of the sacraments. The minister we see is acting in the name of Christ, and so Christ acts through the minister. It is irrelevant whether or not the minister is in good moral standing. The sacraments are not about the minister or even the recipient. The sacraments are about the Church acting in the name and person of Christ to ensure his saving work continues. Christ will use whoever is duly deputed to serve in the name of the Church as minister of the sacraments. The minister, of course, will need to answer to God if they are not in a state of grace, but that does not prevent God from using them as an instrument of his mercy in the lives of others.

Next week we will complete our home with the plumbing, electrical, doors, and windows.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to call/text me at (978) 254-0560.

If you prefer to email, please visit <https://theholyrood.org/email-fr-brian>.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,
Fr. Brian

