

Liturgical Catechesis; Homily 1  
'The One Sacrament, Jesus Christ'

If I were to ask you to “name examples of some trucks,” it would be very different from asking you to “define what a truck is.” Thus, if I asked for examples, someone who works at Ford might immediately call out “trucks that are built Ford tough,” and a GM employee might immediately call out “we’ll be there” with Chevrolet. But, if I asked for a definition, we must yield to Webster who tells us a truck is a self-propelling type of carriage, usually with a combustion engine, used for hauling goods.

In a similar light, there is a difference between *defining* what a sacrament is and *naming* types of sacraments. Thus, does anyone recall the old Baltimore Catechism’s definition of a sacrament? In the recent Catechism (no. 1131) we would find that a sacrament is *an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church*. Now, for myself I sometimes find the formal definition too bulky. Thus, what I use as a “running definition” is that a sacrament is *a visible sign of God’s love*.

With that in mind (and this is a trick question) I ask you, “How many sacraments or how many visible signs of God’s love are there?” Let me suggest that there is only one visible sign of God’s love. It is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection, is the one and only visible sign of the depths of God’s love for us. He is the fullness of grace made visible, or as the Catechism states (no. 774), “Christ himself is the mystery of salvation. The saving work of his holy and sanctifying humanity is the sacrament of salvation.”

With that in mind (and this is, again, a trick question) I ask you, how many sacraments or how many visible signs of God’s love revealed in Christ are there? Let me suggest that this is one visible sign of God’s love revealed in Christ.

To strike at this, listen to Christ as he speaks to Saul at the moment of his conversion (Acts 9: 3-5).

*Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...”*

Jesus does not say, “persecuting my followers, those who believe in me, those who follow my teachings, or anything of the sort. By baptism, Christ is so closely united with the believer that he identifies himself in the life of the believer. Or, as Saint Paul says after his conversion (Gal 2:20), “It is not longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”

Thus, the communities of believers itself is the visible sign of God’s love revealed in Christ. The Church, head and members, you and me, make Christ visible to the world around us. As a Church, the way we live and work and play, the way we care for one another and the poor, the way we serve the needs of the community . all our lives .priests and faithful .make Christ visible and present. The Catechism echoes this (nos. 775, 780) when it says, “the Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all” and that “The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation...”

Finally, we can understand the seven sacraments (and especially the Eucharist) in the broader context of Christ’s saving mystery. There is one saving mystery, one visible sign of God’s love, apart from which we need nothing else .Christ Jesus. Christ founded the Church to then be a sign and an instrument of unity with God and with one another until the end of time. Thus, when we come together to celebrate any of the sacraments it is both an action of Christ, who is deepening the mystery of his saving grace in us, and our action by which we show forth the saving mystery (cf., no. 1118).

In other words, the sacraments are both a means by which we give glory to God and a means by which God offers life-giving grace to us.