

# FAITH NOTES

September 24/25, 2016



Parish of Immaculate Conception/Saint Anthony

## Who Do You Say that I Am?

*God desires to be in relationship with us even more than we desire to be in relationship with God.*

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This question which Jesus first asked his original disciples is addressed to each of us today! Our answer will depend upon our relationship with Jesus Christ and what we have learned of him through the years.

What we believe about Jesus has implications for our understanding and appreciation of our sacramental life.

Christology, the formal study of Jesus Christ, using the revelation found in Scripture and Tradition insists that God is love and anything that we say about Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection must be true to this fact. Love-always desiring the good of the other - wants to be in relationship with the beloved. Said another way, it is our belief that God desires to be in relationship with us even more than we desire to be in relationship with God.

When some of us were being instructed in our faith we understood the resurrection as a proof of Jesus' divinity. In recent years,

with the benefit of better tools for understanding Scripture, we have a wider appreciation of the resurrection and its implications for Jesus' life and ours.

Key to deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ and our understanding of sacraments is the distinction between resuscitation and resurrection. Jesus resuscitated Lazarus; he had to die again! Jesus was resurrected; meaning that he is alive and available to us. Today, he lives on a whole different plane of existence, in God's time and space. This allows his presence to us now, offering forgiveness, reconciliation, life and hope.

Some of our prayers and statements about Jesus Christ speak of his being exalted at the right hand of the Father which could lead us to think that Jesus is removed from us, sitting at the right hand of the Father. The statement, however, is a metaphorical way of proclaiming that



Jesus' ministry, passion, death, and resurrection have been embraced by the Father. Furthermore, Jesus' values, choices and obedience have been affirmed as God's way of being in the world.

One identity Jesus claimed as his own was that of shepherd. The good shepherd, with great care and concern, treats each sheep as they need to be treated. It follows then that God reaches out to each one of us as we are and gives us what we need in order to live a full and meaningful life for ourselves and others.

## October is *Whole Parish Catechesis* Month

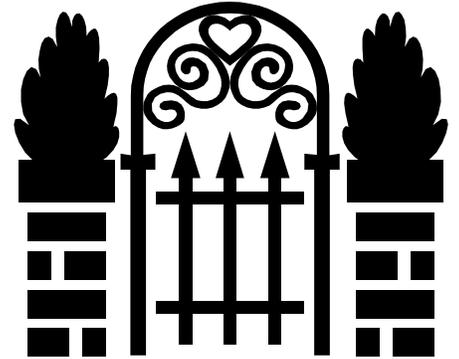
### What is *Whole Parish Catechesis*?

Simply put, *Whole Parish Catechesis*” is an opportunity for all members of the parish faith community to reflect on some aspect of our lives as Catholic Christians.

### How does it happen?

There is no one way to go about it! Much depends upon the parish. In our parish we will use the days of October to reflect on the sacraments in our journey of faith. Each week there will be 1) opportunities to for adults to gather and 2) an issue of “Faith Notes.” Gatherings will take place either on Thursday evening or Saturday afternoon. At these there will be input,

reflection, discussion and an opportunity to socialize with fellow parishioners. Both the “Faith Notes” and the gatherings will explore what it is we believe about the particular sacrament(s) of that week. The “Faith Notes” will also have questions for personal reflection and some suggestions for reflection within the family or other gathering.

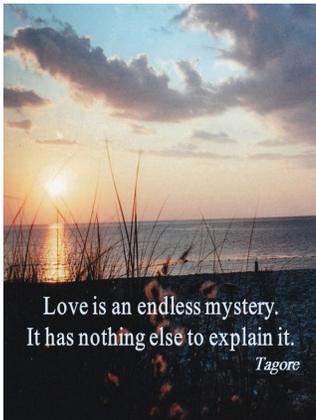


The door to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ

### Why participate?

Probably there are as many reasons as there are people in the parish. But underlying all them is the opportunity to deepen our

relationship with Jesus Christ. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* invited each of us to a “renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them.”



Love is an endless mystery.  
It has nothing else to explain it.  
*Tagore*

## There are Seven Sacraments. Aren't there?

No doubt, you can recall the definition of sacrament, learned as a child. “A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.” This concise statement was an attempt to express Christ’s continuing presence and action in the life of the Church in and through tangible, visible signs/symbols. It’s helpful as far as it goes.

**Some Misperceptions**  
But it has lent itself to a number of misunderstandings and/or wrong emphases. For example, some people see and talk about sacraments as things rather than as a relationship where God graciously reaches out and invites us to a radically new way of being and doing. Seeing sacraments as things is what lies behind the talk

about getting one’s baptism or getting one’s confirmation.

Another misperception is that of seeing sacraments as events which take place at specified times in a person’s life. So for example, I was baptized as an infant, received my First Eucharist at seven, confirmed at 12. I celebrate the sacrament of reconcili-

## There are Seven Sacraments. Aren't there? (continued)

ation when I have sinned, etc. But, if we see sacraments solely as events occurring at turning points in our lives, we run the big risk of being unable to recognize that these encounters with the saving, transforming presence of God in the sacraments is an ongoing process.

### Jesus, the Sacrament of Encounter with God

It was during Vatican II, also called the pastoral council, that the Church explored new or renewed images to better express the mystery of the Christ's presence and action. They wanted to emphasize the reality/mystery that sacraments are encounters or meetings with God. Another desired outcome was that we know that although we celebrate a sacrament at a specific time, the sacrament continues to unfold and have its effects in our lives. Their more pastoral way of speaking about the sacraments might be less familiar to many Catholics formed in their faith prior to the 1980's?

The Council Fathers called Jesus Christ the sacrament of God. What is it they were trying to say by this? As we strive to deepen in our faith, we also need to ask, "What could we possibly mean when say Jesus Christ is the sacrament of God?"

Vatican II was retrieving parts of our tradition that had not been part of our collective memories for over 400 years. Sacramental theology was returning to a richer understanding of sacrament that was part of the Tradition prior to the Council of Trent in the 16th century. At that time and especially in the early Church, the word "sacrament" was not limited to the seven that we celebrate as Catholics.

Sacraments were understood as any created reality which revealed the hidden presence of God and radically changed or transformed the person in the divine-human interchange. St. Augustine was known to have spoken of hundreds of sacraments.

Recovery of this more comprehensive and traditional perspective gives us eyes to see and appreciate God's love, adoption, healing, forgiveness, service, and reconciliation firmly rooted in creation and also part of our everyday experience. Thus, sacraments are not so much happenings when God gives us grace but celebrations of God's saving, redeeming power made evident in Jesus Christ. They are graced opportunities for our be-

coming more truly conformed to the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### What Difference Does It Make Anyway?

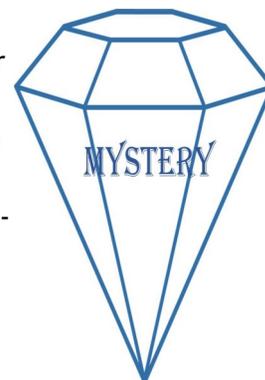
At this point the question we might be asking is, "So what difference does this make in our lives?"

The difference it makes is that a fuller understanding of sacrament puts us in a better position to appreciate sacraments as a part of our everyday lives. It also provides some direction in how we can work to make sacraments a reality in our faith journey.

### Sacraments in Daily Life

If you think that what follows will be about daily Eucharist, and frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) you will probably be disappointed. The issue is not reception but rather a vision of ourselves and the sacraments.

Earlier it was mentioned that the sacraments continue to unfold and have their effects in our lives. Appreciating the reality/mystery that years after the actual celebration, the



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sacrament continues to have its effects might be clearer if we look at the way the church clusters the sacraments. Today we speak of three groups of sacraments all flowing from or to the central sacrament, the Eucharist. The three clusters are:

1. Sacraments of Initiation
2. Sacraments of Healing
3. Sacraments of Service.

In the interests of moving to some practical considerations, our first week will focus on the first two sacraments of Initiation. In subsequent weeks we will examine the Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick and the Sacraments of Service: Marriage and Holy Orders.

### Sacraments of Initiation

The Church refers to Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist as the Sacraments of Initiation. These three bring us into full adult membership in the Body of Christ and equip us to continue the mission of Jesus Christ--announcing and helping to usher in the reign of God. Baptism begins the initiation process. That is, when we are immersed in the waters of baptism, we die to solidarity to evil--

sin and death--and rise to new life in Jesus Christ. We become part of the new creation and are knit to the Body of Christ, the church. The vocation that flows from baptism is that of

1. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ
2. Having his mind and heart in all situations and
3. Living out his passion, death, and resurrection.

### Conversion and Discipleship

Conversion and discipleship require our involvement. They don't happen automatically--we have to work at it! Confirmation which is intimately connected to baptism seals us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live out our vocation of discipleship to Jesus Christ. This sealing or confirming the gifts of the Holy Spirit for most of the history of Christianity took place before first Eucharist. Once we are knit to Christ and become a member his Body, the church welcomes us to the table of the Lord to eat and drink. Gathering around the Lord's Table to remember, thank, bless, and

eat is what we call Eucharist. Continued initiation into the Body of Christ happens through the doing and receiving of Eucharist. When you think about it, Eucharist is the only repeatable sacrament of initiation and one connected intimately with our ongoing conversion so that eventually we will have the mind and heart of Christ. This is our faith. The sacraments of initiation, far from being events of the past, involve a dynamic relationship with God's Spirit who gives us the ability and power to die and rise with Jesus Christ in and through the daily events and relationships of our lives.

### Questions

1. How often do you think about your relationship with Jesus Christ?
2. What do you do to nurture and celebrate this relationship?
3. What is the date of your baptism?



### Save the Date! Gatherings about Sacraments

Oct 6, 8: Baptism and Confirmation

Oct 13, 15: Eucharist

Oct 20, 22: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick

Oct 27, Nov 5: Matrimony

Thursdays @ 7PM

Saturdays @ 2:30PM