

Chapter 1: We Are Part of the Church



Introduction

How many different groups of people are you part of? One group is your family. Another group is your class at school. Do you belong to other sports or clubs? It is important for us to be part of different groups. God made us to be with others. We receive God's love through other people in the groups we belong to.

The most important groups we belong to are our family and the Church. Jesus started the Church as a special way for us to receive God's love. You became a member of the Church when you were baptized. **Baptism** is the first sacrament every Catholic receives. Now you are preparing to receive another sacrament, the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Through these sacraments, God shares his love for us. And he wants us to share his love with all the people in the groups we belong to!

Scripture Story: Every Baptized Person Is a Part of the Church

In the Bible, Saint Paul compares the Church to a human body. Let's see what he says about how the people in the Church should work together:

For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. If the foot were to say, "Because I am not a hand, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. . . .

All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:14-18, 27)

Christ's Body is the Church. The Church is even called the Body of Christ. The Bible tells us that the Church has many parts or many people. Just as a body has feet, hands, ears, and eyes, the Church has men and women, young people and old people, people of all colors and all countries. No two people are exactly the same, and every person is special.

Jesus wants every person to be a member of his special Body, including you! Each of us has gifts we can use to help the Church spread God's love. Jesus started the Church so we can continue his work of loving and healing the world and its people. As a member of the Body of Christ, how will you use your gifts for helping other people? How will you use your gifts to spread God's love?

God Gave Us the Sacraments

Jesus gave us seven great and holy signs of God's love. These signs are called **sacraments**. The Seven Sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. Jesus gave the Church these Seven Sacraments to bring us closer to him. The sacraments give us **grace**, the gift of God's life in us. Grace makes us God's children and helps us do good things. We can be sure that when we receive the sacraments with faith, they will accomplish what they signify; that is, they will do in us what the words and actions of the sacraments say they will do. They will help us to be faithful followers of Jesus.

The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, together, are called **Sacraments of Christian Initiation**. *Initiation* is a word that means "beginning." Receiving these three sacraments begins our life in the Church.

God's Treasure of the Eucharist

The Sacrament of Baptism gives us new life and unites us with Jesus. This is a sacrament you have already received. Most likely, you were baptized

as a baby and probably don't remember it. Your parents or guardians spoke for you and promised to teach you about God's love.

We first received the Holy Spirit when we were baptized. In the Sacrament of **Confirmation**, a bishop or priest anoints us with holy oil. This is a sign that we are given the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and that the graces we received at Baptism are made perfect. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we grow closer to Jesus and closer to the Church. As confirmed members of the Body of Christ, we eagerly take on the Church's mission to spread the Good News of God's love to all, through our words and actions.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the sacrament you are preparing for now, as you have already been baptized. We say that the Eucharist is at the heart of our life together as a Church. It brings all Catholics together as one Body and helps us be the best members of the Church and followers of Jesus we can be. After you make your First Communion, you are invited to receive the Eucharist every time you go to Mass, as long as you are not in a state of serious sin.

When adults are baptized, they usually receive Confirmation and the Eucharist at the same time. When infants or adults are baptized in the Eastern Catholic Churches, they receive all three Sacraments of Christian Initiation at the same time. This shows that these three sacraments are closely connected.

Things to Remember

- We are all an important part of the Church.
- Jesus gave us the Seven Sacraments. The sacraments are great and holy signs of God's love.
- The three Sacraments of Christian Initiation begin our life in the Church. They are Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist is the most important sacrament in the Church, and we celebrate it again and again.