

# THE SACRAMENTS: OUR TREASURE



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## INTRODUCTION:

### GRATITUDE

1. With deep sense of gratitude, we offer unlimited thanks to God our Almighty and merciful Father for the opportunity to reflect on yet another very important aspect of our faith namely, the Sacraments. In the recent past we reflected on the *Beatitudes* and on *Mary our Mother*. Last year, we reflected on *The Holy Eucharist*, a mystery of Faith per excellence, the source and summit of all our Christian life and worship and the centre of all the other sacraments. We are ever grateful for the warm reception given to that pastoral letter and indeed to all my past pastoral letters. It is our ardent prayer that the contents of these letters will be of immense assistance to us in our journey through time to God's Eternal Kingdom.

2. In order to experience the Father's love, God the Father sent his only son Jesus Christ to live among us as a man. The simplicity of Jesus Christ's presence liquidates distance and creates a communion of man and God which is consistent with the truth that it pleases God to make us His sons and daughters. Hence, through the visible Christ, the son of God, humans are able to feel, know and believe the invisible Blessed Trinity. As such, the principle of sacramentality has been present from the commencement of the mystery of God's self-revelation in time. God uses sensible objects or means imbued with symbolic significance to communicate to humans.

3. However, in the fullness of time God spoke to us through his son (cf. Hb. 1:1); through him came the revelation of the mystery, which was hidden in God before all ages (cf. Col 1:25-27). With the revelation God gradually commenced the sacramental economy.

4. When Jesus Christ walked on earth, he was limited to one place and one time. But at his resurrection, he broke the boundaries of time and space. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:11-18) and to the disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35). He then walked through locked doors to offer the greetings of "peace" to his Apostles and disciples (Jn. 20: 19-20). The Ascension marked the end of these extraordinary appearances. However, Jesus did not abandon humanity. But in his unfathomable love before his departure, Christ had instituted and entrusted the Sacraments to his Church so that we could meet him, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in our time and in our place until the end of time. We meet him in the sacraments.

5. The Sacraments are "powers that come forth" from the body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are the masterworks of God in the new and everlasting covenant (cf. CCC. 1115). The Church recognized this treasure from Christ together with the duty to dispense it as a faithful steward of God's mysteries (cf. CCC 1117). Christ acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit for the Church. The Sacraments are actions of Christ who is the source and foundation of the sacraments.

6. But to meet Christ in the Sacraments, we need faith. We received this gift of faith at Baptism, united with the faith of the Church, which comes before our own individual faith and enriches it. This faith needs to be nurtured. This pastoral letter is an effort towards that. Moreover, our aim is

to deepen our understanding of the gift of God in Christ through his sacraments; to foster our appreciation of his marvelous atonement wrought for us wholly and freely, and to increase our consciousness of this endowment, “this treasure”, towards our salvation and salvation of all men and women for the glory of God. We have therefore chosen for our reflection, the mystery of the sacraments as treasure which we received from Christ. The sacraments bring us to a deeper encounter with Christ who is our way to our heavenly Father.

7. In a way, the reality of the sacraments summarizes the Christian dispensation, especially given the sacramentality of Christ himself and that of the Church, his body. The sacraments occupy a central importance in our Christian lives most especially as Catholic faithfuls as they are a temporal manifestation of the great work of God in himself, in his Church and through the sacramentality of the Church to Christians as individuals.

8. In our world today, there seems to be a growing indifference towards the Sacramental mystery and the sacraments are being relegated to secondary importance. Some see the sacraments as a distraction or an obstacle to their direct relationship with God. Now, given our responsibility to teach the undiluted faith, we consider it incumbent on us to offer these insights, clarifications, and teachings on the value of the sacraments hoping that adequate knowledge of the meaning of this mystery will lead us to a renewed appreciation and devotion to the sacraments. I hereby invite you to reflect with me on this topic – The Sacraments: Our Treasure from Christ.

9. Treasure ordinarily means something of great worth or value. It could mean wealth of any kind or in any form. It is a possession that is highly valued. The Sacraments are a treasure because in them Christ has given us the means of our salvation as well as himself who is the way to our heavenly Father

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE MEANING OF SACRAMENT**

#### **What is a Sacrament?**

10. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions (CCC, 1131). This simple definition has three profound elements which help us to understand the full meaning of Sacrament. First, the sacrament is a sign. Secondly, sacraments are instituted by Christ and finally, the Sacraments confer Grace.

11. A sign always signifies something else; it points to something real beyond itself. Like Christ’s miracles in the Gospels (which Scripture calls signs), sacraments work by sign. However, the sacraments are sacred signs and unlike ordinary signs, a sacrament confers what it signifies. Thus, Sacraments sanctify men, build up the body of Christ and finally give worship to God. (cf. CCC, 1123). In every sacrament there is a visible element, and an invisible element. The visible is a sign of the invisible. Christ acts upon us at the invisible level in the Sacraments and we encounter him.

Hence, in the Sacraments, the love, power, and grace of the Paschal Mystery are applied to us in a particular way, for the sanctification of our lives.

12. According to the Council of Trent, “the Sacraments of the New Covenant are all instituted by Christ” (cf. CCC, 1114, CIC can. 840). Sacrament is essentially a mystery. It is God’s initiative and action, and never human achievement. We only respond to God’s initiative in and through the sacramental structure. Through the sacraments, God gathers His scattered children into a communion in the divine mysteries. As in the incarnation of Christ in whom “we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see” (cf. Christmas Preface), the sacraments bring us into contact with the invisible God. Christ is the source and foundation of the sacraments and they are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work. It is he who baptizes, he who acts in each of the sacraments... (cf. CCC, 1127).

13. Finally, Sacraments confer grace. Grace means, the undeserved gift of God. It is the work of God where he shares his very life with us. Sacraments give grace “ex opere operato” which means by the very fact of the action’s being performed. That is, by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God. From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit act in and through the sacrament, independently of the personal holiness of the minister (cf. CCC, 1128). So when we look at the presiding or officiating priest, we should see the invisible perfect Christ, not the visible imperfect minister. The Church teaches that the sacraments are the work of Christ.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE SACRAMENTS – Historical Background

14. Etymologically, the Latin word “Sacramentum” is derived from the infinitive “sacrare”. It meant a person who was set apart by divine right. It also designated a function reserved for public authority. The word sacramentum was used in a rather expansive way to refer simultaneously to the person who performed the consecration; the consecrated person, the act of consecration itself, as well as the means or instruments used for the consecration. The oath of service taken by soldiers was also called sacramentum. The oath was imbued with religious significance as it invoked the gods to bind them to their service as soldiers.

15. Sacramentum was the Latin rendering of Greek word mysterion(mystery). In the Old Testament, mysterion was used to stand for the divine plan for the salvation of man, and the unclear revelation of this plan to the human being. In the Gospel, the coming of the messianic Kingdom in Christ was also referred to as mysterion; but the meaning of mysterion was much more fully developed in the letters of St. Paul. Paul used the term mystery to refer to various dimensions of the salvific mission of Christ including God’s plan for the salvation of man, a plan which was hidden before creation. Also, to refer to the manifestation of the same plan in the prophets and the apostles through the Holy Spirit. It also meant Christ himself who is the mystery revealed in his incarnation and glorification; and finally, Christ in his followers who receive salvation which will come to fulfillment at the end of time. The religious use of the word sacramentum is parallel to that of the Greek word mysterion.

16. The Catholic Church has never limited her understanding of the word sacrament to a narrow definition. This is perhaps due to the very encompassing nature of the reality, and the historical fact that there has been steady but gradual appreciation of its meaning by theologians. But there are many definitions and descriptions of the word sacrament by many theologians in the history of the Church. St. Augustine's idea about the sacrament may be taken as formative of many later descriptions of sacrament. There are three different classes of things which St. Augustine called sacraments: religious rites of the Old and New Testaments; Symbols or Figures; and the revealed teachings of Christianity. The advancement of learning in medieval times facilitated the first systematic attempts to define sacrament. For the Angelic Doctor – (Thomas Aquinas), “a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing in as much as it sanctified men” (ST. 3a, 60.2). Thomas Aquinas did not mention the institution of Sacraments by Christ, but it is likely that for him the fact of sanctification of man necessarily implied the action of the sanctifying Lord. However, his short definition is an indication of the gradual development of the understanding of the Sacraments and the improvement of the effort to express such an understanding.

17. The Council of Trent, with its spirited effort to counter the negative effects of the Protestant Reformation was very instrumental in setting down the Church's teachings on the Sacraments. Its understanding of the Sacraments was set down in the Catechism of the Council of Trent. And, for many years it remained the working definition of Sacrament: “an outward sign of inward grace, instituted by Christ for our sanctification”. This definition contains the main elements in the Sacrament; namely, sign/symbol which is external; grace which is inward or better put, spiritual; institution by Christ; and sanctification of the human being. Mainly in line with this thought J.R. Quinn describes sacrament as “visible signs chosen by Christ to bring to mankind the grace of His Paschal Mystery” (cf. Theology of Sacraments, p.806). Quinn's definition contains the four main elements taken up in the definition of the Tridentine Catechism. It is the same with the more recent definition of Herbert Musurillo: “In a general sense sacraments are the liturgical or ritual signs by which the graces of the Atonement are channeled to men, and by their very nature they demand some authoritative designation by the founder of the Church, the author of our Redemption.” (cf. The Sacraments in Early Christian Tradition, p. 250).

18. In more recent times, there have been attempts at more comprehensive and more deeply theological understanding of the sacraments. All the above explanations seem to concentrate on the description of the elements involved in the celebration of the sacraments, their effect on the individual Christian and the foundation of the sacraments, Christ himself. But more comprehensive understanding attempts to view the sacraments in terms of personal encounter with the Lord; and the Church as the very possibility of the actualization of this encounter. This in itself underlines the importance of worship in the sacramental economy. Edward H. Schillebeeckx called the sacraments an encounter with God, and inveighed against the practice of looking at them from the perspective of cause-effect relationship – which tends to depersonalize the sacramental encounter between God and man. For him, the sacraments are “a living, personal encounter with God.” Thus, Christ himself is the primal sacrament and so is the church, which is in no way separated from the Lord being his body. Hence the Christological dimension of the sacraments deeply implies the ecclesiastical dimension:

***The Christological dimension of the sacraments can be better appreciated after we have explained their ecclesiastical dimension. When we spoke...of the sacraments as the earthly***

*garments in which God cloths his revelation, we meant above all the Church herself. For the Church is the visible historical representation of the accomplished redemption. As the earthly channel of God's revelation, she is essentially both sacrament and word. Both of these are the specific operative sphere of the apostolic office as Christ has fashioned it through his spirit. (cf. Sacraments: An Encounter with God, p. 241)*

19. Hence, a deep appreciation of the mystery of the sacraments brings into clear focus the mystical body of Christ, the Church. For Schillebeckx, the Church is like the visible manifestation of the salvation of Christ as well as the channel of its continued actualization in human history. The earthly church becomes the palpable and continuing presence of God's grace among humans. Christ as man is the primal sacrament, and the Church as his body mystically shares this characterization. Karl Rahner emphasizes this sacramental nature of Christ and his body the Church, making it a necessity for salvation. He says,

*Any grace-giving event has a quasi-sacramental structure and shares in Christ's character as both divine and human. But when the Church in her official, organized, public capacity precisely as the source of redemptive grace meets the individual in the actual ultimate accomplishment of her nature, there we have sacraments in the proper sense, and they can then be seen to be the essential functions that bring into activity the very essence of the Church herself. (cf. A Rahner Reader, p. 281)*

20. In sum, by his love Christ wrought atonement for the offenses of humans. To do this, he had to take on human form to become a man like us in all things but sin (Heb. 4:15). The incarnation of Christ is in fact the manifestation of the hidden, non-material God. In becoming human, Christ became a sign, a symbol of God's redeeming intention which was fulfilled by his passion and his resurrection. Since his salvation remains non-material and eternal, while he is fully man and always, Christ is the sacrament of our atonement through whom we achieve encounter with God (cf. Schillebeckx). But this encounter is mediated by the Church (cf. Rahner), which is mystically the body of Christ, and thus with Christ is the primal sacrament. It is in fact in fulfilling its duty as sacrament that the Church becomes fully realized as it sanctifies individual believers. This is the depth of the sacramental mystery which the catechism of Trent simplified as "an outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ by which grace is given to our souls." The multiple sacraments are like differentiated by fundamentally united channels through which God's salvation flows to us through his Church. Thus, the reality of the sacramental economy is indispensably rooted in our faith and life as children of God and followers of the ever redeeming Christ. This is clearly underlined by the Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy:

*The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and finally to give worship to God; because they are signs, they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "Sacraments of faith." They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity. (cf. Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 59)*

21. Although the sacraments whenever celebrated with the intention of the Church act ex opere operato, that is, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts independently of the personal holiness of

the minister, nevertheless the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them. Hence the New Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) has summarized the Church's understanding of the sacraments in the following definition: "The Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions". (cf. CCC, 1131).

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NECESSITY OF THE SACRAMENTS

22. One of the greatest appeals to sacramentality and pointer to using sensible things to bring about spiritual effect is the healing of a blind man when Jesus spat on clay and used it as a sacramental contact point for the healing he wanted to give the person (cf. Mk. 8:22-26). Of course, Jesus Christ had the power to heal him without making use of any object but he rather chose to do as he did in order to set an example for us. This is one of the actions of Christ that teaches us the necessity of the sacraments.

23. The Sacraments are represented in signs and symbols. They are described as outward signs of inward grace. They are physical representations of realities that are not visible. This emphasizes the element of Faith which according to Thomas Aquinas triumphs where the senses fail: *prestes fides supplementum sensum defectui*. The question is why this long process, so to say, of assessing the atonement of Christ? Why does God not confer his graces, his gift of salvation directly by fiat to men and women of goodwill? So are the Sacraments really necessary? Let us borrow a leaf from J.H. Pollen in answer to this puzzle:

***God is not restricted to the use of material, visible symbols in dealing with men; the sacraments are not necessary in the sense that they could not have been dispensed with. But if it is shown that God has appointed external, visible ceremonies as means by which certain graces are to be conferred on men, then in order to obtain those graces it will be necessary for men to make use of those Divinely appointed means. (J.H. Pollen, Sacraments, p. 259)***

24. The appointment of "external visible ceremonies" points to the condition attendant on the sacrament of the New Law, which is, that it must be instituted by Christ our redeemer and founder of his Church. But this also means, following Pollen's statement, that the sacraments are necessary. However, their necessity is not absolute but hypothetical necessity. Not being absolutely necessary entails that God is all powerful and can choose to dispense with material and external manifestations in achieving his ends. But Christ's institution of the sacraments also makes them hypothetically necessary, since if we intend to achieve certain supernatural ends, it behooves us to use the means which have been stipulated by Christ himself for achieving such ends. Thus while God was in no way bound to make use of external realities as symbols in the sacraments, it has pleased him to do so. Recall that in the blind man's healing, Christ was not bound to make use of external signs but he chose to do so.

25. Still human reflection leads us to the realization that God's stipulation of the sacraments was not whimsical. Christian theologians have described the necessity of the sacraments as the necessity of suitableness (*necessitas – convenientiae*). It is not necessity in the strict sense, but really the most appropriate manner of dealing with creatures that God has created to be both corporeal and spiritual. The system of the Sacraments, where outward signs/symbols point to non-visible reality is the most appropriate in mediating the salvation of the human being. In the sense in which Sacrament means the pointing to the divine and sacred by the material, it can be said that, the world as we know it is a vast sacramental system, since material things are for human beings pointers to or signs of sacred things and divinity in general. Psalm 18:2 reminds us that the heavens proclaim the greatness of God, and the firmament shows forth his glory, just as Paul's Letter to the Romans reminds us that from the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. (Rm. 1:20).

26. Similar consideration is why the redemption of human beings was not accomplished by sudden and invisible manner. The human being is a subject of history, and so when God in his mercy decided to save man, he did not just exercise his almighty power by ordering a fiat. He prepared his people through the patriarchs and the prophets historically and sent his only son "when the fullness of time has come." (Gal. 4:4). The incarnation took place in the way it did, not because of any constraint on the part of God, but because he wanted to save human beings in the manner that was best suited to their nature. Again, the Church founded by Christ was to be, in addition to other things, a visible organization, at least in so far as its earthly members are concerned. As a consequence of this visibility, it should have external ceremonies and symbols that direct the consciousness of its members to the sacred, the spiritual and the invisible. This implies that the principal reason for the sacraments or more appropriately, the sacramental system is found in earthly creation, especially in the human being. According to Thomas Aquinas, it is the nature of the human being to be led by things corporeal and sensible to things that are intelligible and spiritual. The human knowledge system can in fact not dispense with the sensible, as the famous epistemic principle states: there is nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses. Divine providence usually provides for everything in accordance with its nature (*secundum modum suae conditionis*) especially, since this nature is also the handwork of God the creator. Hence it is fitting that divine wisdom should provide the means of salvation for God's children in the form of corporeal and sensible signs or symbols which are called Sacraments.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **FOUNDATION AND NATURE OF THE SACRAMENTS**

27. From all indications, it can be established that the sacraments have scriptural, theological, Christological and anthropological foundations and basis. From the beginning of time through the election of Israel, revelation took a historical journey until its definitive accomplishment in Christ, which is the ultimate and definitive revelation of God. While Christ is the visible dimension of God's revelation as the image of God, the Spirit remains the invisible element infusing love in us and preparing us to actively receive Christ. This encounter with God through the visible Christ and the invisible spirit is sacramental. According to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "All sacraments, that is all the fundamental liturgical acts of the Church, have a Christological structure, they are the



communications of him who, because he is God's visible word, is truly the founder of the Christian Sacraments." (Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, p. 47). As the visible Christ manifests the invisible love of God, he displays the principles and foundation of sacramentality. Again, since our knowledge of God passes through the senses and God relates to us according to our nature, our interaction with God involves effective signs.

28. The Sacraments are signs and symbols which indicate God's difference from the nature of human beings, his creatures. St. Thomas Aquinas explains the Sacraments as signs of three things: the passion of Christ, grace and glory. (cf. ST. 3a, 60.3). His description is in accordance with the Sacred Scriptures where the Sacraments are presented as signs of our redemption. In his letter to the Romans, Paul states that by Baptism we believers joined Christ passion, entering into the grave with him, so that just as the Father caused Christ to rise from the dead, we too may live a new life. (Rm. 6:4). Thus by baptism, Christ's work of redemption becomes our own in a sacramental manner. The signs of God's redemption exhibited in Baptism become the avenue through which we are given God's life, new life or grace. Grace in itself is the effect of glory, and the ultimate consequence of Christ's sacramental action is our sanctification.

29. As signs, Sacraments proclaim what God accomplishes in them. They indicate or teach God's sanctification which they purvey to us, thus making us sharers of God's grace. Signs are didactic, that is why the clearer we perceive in faith the greater our chance of union with the Almighty in the sacramental encounter. But the sacraments are not to be seen merely as avenues of grace, or as mere instruments. They are also signs of our worship as well as that of Christ himself. The Eucharist illustrates this most perfectly as it replicates or reenacts Christ's heroic sacrifice for our sake, while we bow in awe, in our own worship of God through the same sacrifice. Hence, we worship God in the sacramental signs and God grants us the fruit of Christ's redemption, our sanctification.

30. Sacramental rites are spoken of as consisting of two elements: matter and form. These elements together constitute one sacramental sign in keeping with Aristotelian hylomorphism. Before St. Augustine, the early Fathers distinguished these elements as objects (*res*) and prayers that led to their sanctification. In later times, the same distinction was expressed as word (*verbum*) and element. But this later distinction was also very much Augustinian as it was based on his famous epitaph: "The word comes to the element and a sacrament results." With the Scholastics and the influence of Aristotelian philosophy, elements and words were replaced by "Matter" and "Form." Matter and Form throw back to the hylomorphic principles of scholastic metaphysics in which material beings were explicable according to underlying and undifferentiated matter which is given specific nature, shape or being by the form. It is thus the form that gives material beings their specific difference as beings.

31. In the sacraments, the meaning of objects or elements used (matter) is determined by the words (form), just as in hylomorphism, indeterminate matter is given specific nature by its form. Thus the water in Baptism can have varied meanings or purpose. It can be used for cleansing or ablution or for cooling, but with the addition of baptismal formula, it becomes very clear that the use of baptismal water signifies spiritual cleansing from sin. (ST. 3a, 60.6).

32. By this cleansing the sacraments become like channels through which the fruit of the paschal mystery is purveyed to humans. In the words of Pope Leo I, “what was visible in Christ has passed over into the Sacraments of the Church.” Christ the priest offered all, from his incarnation to his glorification, to the honour of his father and for the salvation of man. His ultimate hour was the Passover from his mortal existence to his death, to the resurrection and to ultimate glory, attaining the apogee of his redemptive work. Christ’s redemptive work was all visibly aimed at the worship of his Father who raised him from the dead (Rm. 6:4), and by so doing brought into being a new community, the Church. The Church becomes the community of the redeemed with Christ as its head. From his resurrection what has been accomplished in his mortal body continues to be made effective in his mystical body, the Church, and what was seen in him while on earth is now manifested in the Church. Thus “the dominant note of Christ’s life was His worship of the Father.” In a similar way, the dominant note of the Church is Christ worship with His Church. However, the Church’s worship is centered on the Sacraments with the Holy Eucharist as the anchor of them all. All the Sacraments are the actions of Christ towards the glorification of his Father and the salvation of men. The worship of Christ of his Father continues unending where he is glorified, making intercession for us.

***This heavenly worship becomes visibly present in the Church, first of all in the Eucharist, our sacrifice and also in the rest of the sacraments. They are the means by which men are drawn into the new order and made to share in it ever more fully. In each of them the pasch of Christ, once and for all accepted by the Father operates in us. They are the means by which the Church brings to fulfillment among men the Redemption accomplished by Christ. (J.R. Quinn, Theology of Sacraments, p. 808).***

33. If the Sacraments are means for the fulfillment of Christ’s continued redemptive work, it means that they are effective in mediating the grace which Christ bestowed on the Church and her members. Thus, the Sacraments are much more than mere signs. According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, the Sacraments of the Christian dispensation are not mere signs, they do not merely signify Divine grace, but in virtue of their Divine Institution, they cause that grace in the souls of men. The Sacraments effect or cause what they signify. From the medieval times the causal efficacy of the Sacraments has been expressed by the Latin expression *ex opere operato* (Denzinger, 1608). The implication of this expression is that the grace imbued by the Sacrament is the effect of the power of God. As the rite or the celebration is performed, the power of Christ and his Spirit act in and through the sacrament independent of the holiness of the minister. (cf. CCC, 1128). The importance of this teaching is that it is God himself who is the author of the redemptive grace mediated by the sacraments. Important as the minister or the recipient may be, sacramental efficacy is not the product of human, personal and individual effort. The sacraments contain the grace they signify and this is conferred on human beings that are properly responsive, but they are primarily the work of Christ himself mediated through the Church. It is thus very appropriate to understand *ex opere operato* as *ex opere Christi*. The sacraments are truly the external signs of the work of Christ.

34. *Ex opere operato* does not mean that the human being has no role in his sanctification. Human positive response is most essential for any effective celebration since the free gift of God in Christ must also be freely received. *Ex opere operato* does not therefore dispense from human free choice nor does it annul the negative effect of rejection of God’s grace. However:

*To say that man's willingness is a requisite for grace is not the same as saying that the effects of the sacraments are man's work. Whatever grace we receive sacramentally is Christ's gift, but as in every gift, it must be willingly received; when man does not respond to Christ's action, there is no effect. (J.R. Quinn, p. 810).*

35. Thus, *ex opere operato* acknowledges the primal role of Christ in the sacramental economy. This role is also underlined in the fact that Sacraments are instituted by Christ himself. In somewhat very simple manner, it is stated that three factors are necessary in every sacraments: outward sign, inward grace and divine institution. Christ's institution of the sacraments is easier to appreciate if it is understood that the whole plan of salvation is sacramental. God acts in the world through actions and signs. The incarnate Christ is the Sacrament of God, and all through his life, he performed signs of his worship of his Father, remarkably through his sacrifice which gave birth to the Church, which is in turn the Sacrament of Christ. As actions of Christ's worship in His Church from the Resurrection to the Second Coming, the Sacraments must have their origin in Him. It is therefore understandable why Christ's institution of the Sacraments is a dogma of the Catholic Church. (Dezinger, 1601).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

36. The Church has discerned over the centuries, that among liturgical celebrations there are seven that are, in the strict sense of the term, sacraments instituted by the Lord. (CCC, 1117). Therefore, the Church teaches that Christ instituted the sacraments of the New Law and they are seven namely: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony.

37. There is a similarity between the stages of the natural life and stages of spiritual life. In natural life, we are born, we grow, we are fed, sometimes we are sick or wounded and we heal, we have different roles in life and we die. The sacraments correspond to these dimensions. Baptism is spiritual birth. Confirmation is spiritual growth. Holy Eucharist is spiritual food. Penance, also called Reconciliation or confession is spiritual healing. The Sacrament of Matrimony is spiritual marriage in the service of love. Holy Orders consecrates certain men to shepherd the Church and humanity in the name of Christ. It is spiritual leadership. Anointing of the Sick spiritually strengthens, forgives and sometimes heals a person in life-threatening sickness. It also consecrates one's death to Christ. So, through the Sacraments, Christ consecrates these different dimensions or stages of our lives and elevates them so that our lives might be sanctified by His Grace.

38. The Church has placed the seven sacraments into three major groups corresponding to the important moments of Christian life which the sacraments touch.

➤ The first group has three sacraments called the Sacraments of Initiation. They play formative roles in Christian life. They are Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.

➤ The second group has two sacraments. They are called Sacraments of Healing, since they impart healing, forgiveness and strength in our struggle with sin, suffering, sickness and death. They are Penance or Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick.

➤ The third group are Vocational Sacraments or Callings, they are sacraments at the service of communion and the mission of the faithful, oriented towards the building up of the Church in different ways. These sacraments are Holy Orders and Matrimony.

39. All the sacraments form an organic whole as they play their different roles in our spiritual life. Some of the sacraments like Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders are received only once because of the special sacramental character or divine seal which they impart which cannot be wiped away. Some sacraments like the Holy Eucharist and penance can be received several times because we are in constant need of forgiveness, spiritual nourishment, strength and healing. Anointing of the sick can be repeated when there is need while matrimony can be repeated if one's spouse dies since the bond ends with death.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

40. The Sacraments of Christian Initiation are Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. These lay the foundations of every Christian life. As Pope Paul VI explains, the faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these...they receive in increasing measure the treasures of divine life (cf. CCC, 1212).

#### 41. 5.1 BAPTISM {New Birth into the Body of Christ}

The Sacrament of Baptism is the first sacrament of Christian Initiation. It is the basis of the entire Christian life. In Baptism we become members of Christ and of the Church, and we also become sharers in her mission to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. Baptism is the door which gives access to the other sacraments and the gateway to life in the Spirit. The word Baptism comes from the Greek word *bap-tizein* which means to plunge or immerse. In Baptism we are plunged into Christ's death from which we rise up with him to new life in Christ to live as new creatures. Baptism is also called "the bath of enlightenment" for through baptism we are enlightened by the word, that is, Christ and we receive "the true light" (John 1:9), that enlightens every follower of Christ. As the doorway into the life of Christ, the Church and other sacraments, Baptism is entrance into covenant with God and the beginning of a journey that leads to eternal life. Christ calls it a "new birth" from above without which no one can enter the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3: 3-5). It is bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:5). As birth is life-changing marking the beginning of natural life, so does baptism mark the beginning of supernatural life.

42. St. Gregory of Nazianzus describes Baptism as God's most beautiful and magnificent gift. He calls it grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. (cf. CCC, 1216).

#### THE EFFECTS OF BAPTISM

43. Baptism has two effects, one of which takes something away and the other of which gives something to the recipient. "Through Baptism we are freed from sin and are reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ...incorporated into the Church... (CCC, 1213). The first effect of baptism is the taking away of Original Sin, which is accomplished by a total cleansing, symbolized by washing with water. Also, by Baptism all sins are forgiven, both original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin (CCC, 1263).

44. The second effect of Baptism is a real spiritual transformation, the beginning of our sharing in the very life of God himself which is the fundamental end and purpose of life itself and the whole Catholic religion. This mystery is called by many different names, such as, supernatural life, eternal life, divine life, sanctifying grace, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, justification, sanctification and salvation. This all begins in Baptism in which we die to our old self and are "born again" to this new identity. Baptism makes one an adopted son of God (Gal 4: 5-7), who has become a partaker of the divine nature (2Peter 1:4), member of Christ (1Cor. 5:17) and co-heir with him (Rm. 8:17), and a temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1Cor. 6:19; CCC, 1266). "Thus, the whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its root in Baptism." (CCC, 1266). In addition, Baptism seals the Christian with an indelible spiritual mark (or character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, though sin can prevent Baptism from bearing the desired fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated (CCC, 1272).

45. There is also a communal aspect of this second positive effect of Baptism. From the Baptismal font is born the one people of God of the New Covenant, (that is the Church), which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races and sexes. By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (cf. 1Cor 12:13; CCC, 1267). Hence, "Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church." (CCC, 1271).

#### THE WATER SYMBOLISM IN BAPTISM

46. Few things in nature are as necessary to us as water and few things are more beautiful and wonderful. Water refreshes, gives life; it is used for washing and cleansing. It has multiple values.

The Sacred Scriptures make reference to water at various stages of man's salvation history. The Church has seen in Noah's ark a prefiguring of salvation by Baptism. The water of the sea which sometimes bring destruction and death is a symbol of death so can represent the mystery of the cross. By this symbolism Baptism signifies communion with Christ's death (CCC, 1220). Above all, the Church sees the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt as a symbol of the liberation from sin wrought by the waters of baptism. In the Exodus event the same waters brought death to the Egyptians and life to the Jews; in Baptism, the same waters bring death to sin and new life in Christ. Christ started his public ministry after having been

baptized in the water of Jordan by John the Baptist and after his resurrection he gave his apostles the mission: “Go therefore make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...” (Mtt. 28: 19-20; CCC 1223). The use of water in Baptism stands as a strong symbolism of divine action.

## CHRIST AND THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

47. The Special relationship between Christ and the Sacrament of baptism include: First of all, we are baptized into Christ (Rm. 6:3). Secondly, Christ instituted and commanded Baptism (Mtt. 28: 19-20). Thirdly, it is the action of Christ. Christ provides the power for Baptism. He is the source of the supernatural power to remove sins and instill divine life into the baptized. As such, Baptism actually saves us (1Peter 3: 21). Some Protestants argue that it is Christ’s death not baptism that saves us. The truth is, Christ’s death does save us, but this is communicated to us through Baptism (Rom. 6:3).

### *Importance of Infant Baptism*

48. Children have fallen human nature like everybody else therefore need baptism or new birth into the life of grace to which all men are called.

❖ Infant Baptism shows the gratuitousness of God’s grace and the nature of God’s love. God loves us first.

❖ Infant Baptism shows that God withholds his love from no one. Intelligence is no qualification only openness is required and children are more open in their innocence.

❖ Good parents give the best to their children. Nothing is better than God’s grace and becoming a child of God which the parents and the Church would offer a child through baptism.

❖ God relates to us not only as individuals but also as families. Baptism admits a child to the Family of God.

### *Some Happy Implications of Our Baptism*

49. Baptism incorporates us into the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the world.

❖ Baptism leads us to imitate Christ’s example

❖ Baptism makes us members of one another

❖ Baptism reveals the equality and the dignity of each member of the community

❖ Baptism requires us to reject sin and re-assess our values, decisions and life-styles. ❖ In Baptism, we profess our commitment to the Church’s beliefs, values and vision.

- ❖ Baptism invites us to a vocation of holiness and the practice of charity.
- ❖ The baptized are to live as lights in the darkness. They are to live as pilgrims seeking and marching to the Kingdom of the Father.

## 5.2 CONFIRMATION {Maturity and Growth in Christ}

50. Confirmation as a sacrament of Initiation perfects baptismal grace. It provides a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is the Sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds (CCC, 1316).

51. Confirmation helps the confirmed person to witness to Christ and lead a mature Christian life. By Confirmation, those who are anointed share more completely in the mission of Christ Jesus and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he is filled. The anointing in confirmation and reception of the Holy Spirit are supportive of Baptism as further perfection of the Sacrament of initiation. The rite of confirmation, usually performed by a bishop, involves the anointing with Chrism (holy oil), the laying on of hands, and the words “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Confirmation like Baptism imprints an indelible mark or spiritual character such that it can only be received once in a person’s life.

52. Jesus prepared the apostles for this event at the Last Super, and before ascending to his Father, when he spoke to them about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14: 16-17; 14:26; 15:26; 16: 7-15; Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8).

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early Church was filled with strength and boldness to proclaim the Gospel to the world, often in circumstances of great opposition. But it was the desire of Jesus that all of his future disciples would receive the gift of the Spirit, not just those present at the event of Pentecost. Therefore, later on in the Acts of the Apostles we see the Apostles laying their hands on new converts after their baptism, so that they would receive this gift of the Holy Spirit.

53. Such is the basis in divine revelation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. In the sacrament of confirmation, a bishop or a priest having the power of ordination passed down to them from the apostles and Jesus himself, lay hands on a person already baptized, that he or she may receive a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a share in the grace of Pentecost.

### **The Effects of Confirmation**

54. The effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation include:

- ❖ Completion of one’s Baptism through the reception of another sacrament which gives one the power to publicly witness to one’s faith.
- ❖ Deeper incorporation into the mystery of Christ, and the Trinity through the Holy Spirit.

- ❖ Deeper share in the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit through the fruits of the Holy Spirit and charisms.
- ❖ Reception of spiritual strength. Confirmation as sacrament of spiritual growth and maturity gives the grace to face challenges and greater temptations.
- ❖ Deeper incorporation into the Church.
- ❖ Confirmation and completion of Baptism. It is the sealing of Baptismal covenant.

### **The Two Powers Received in Confirmation**

55. Those who are confirmed receive two major powers, one for themselves and one for others. They receive first of all, the power to live a life of personal holiness in a challenging world especially the courage to sacrifice and suffer for Christ. Christians are a people set apart to be light to the society. Also, they receive the power to spread that faith by word and deed, that is, to be witnesses. By the sacrament of confirmation the baptized are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit to be true witnesses of Christ.

### **The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit**

56. There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit namely; wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, fear of the Lord and piety. There are nine fruits of the Holy Spirit as given by St. Paul, they are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5: 22-23). Through the Sacrament of confirmation, we receive the gifts of the Spirit which manifests through the fruits. Again, the seal of the Holy Spirit which we receive through sacramental anointing marks us out as belonging to Christ and enrolling in his service.

### **Social Implications of Confirmation**

57. At Confirmation, we receive diverse spiritual gifts that work together for the common good, for building up of the Church, and for the well-being of humanity.

- ❖ The spirit moves us to imitate the love and service of Christ and the saints.
- ❖ At Confirmation, we recommit to participate in the Church's work and mission
- ❖ At Confirmation, the Holy Spirit inspires us to Gospel action that includes working for justice, peace and human development.

### **5.3 THE HOLY EUCHARIST {Nourishment and Unity in Christ}**

58. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life (LG. no. 11). The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist



and are oriented towards it. For in the Blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch (CCC, 1324).

59. The sacraments are the crown of the Catholic Faith, and the Eucharist is the crown of the Sacraments. This is so because we meet God in action in the Sacraments and Christ our Passover, our Lord and saviour is contained in the Eucharist. The Eucharist completes our initiation into Christ started through Baptism. It is the apex sacrament, the all-embracing mystery which symbolizes the union of both God and man. The Catechism explains that the Eucharist is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit (CCC, 1325). It is God's greatest blessing to man and man's greatest act of worship to God.

### **The Essential Elements of the Eucharist**

60. Only validly ordained priests can preside at the Eucharist and consecrate the bread and the wine so that they become the Body and Blood of the Lord (CCC, 1411). The Liturgy of the Eucharist unfolds according to a fundamental structure which has been preserved throughout the centuries down to our own day. It has two sections that form a fundamental unity: The liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. Within these two, the catechism more specifically mentions four parts: (a) The proclamation of the word of God; (b) Thanksgiving to God the Father for all his benefits, above all the gift of his son; (c) The consecration of bread and wine; and, (d) Participation in the liturgical banquet by receiving the Lord's body and blood. These elements constitute one single act of worship (CCC, 1408).

### **Who are those present?**

61. It is good to remember that in every Eucharistic celebration there are present:

(a) God the Father, to whom the sacrifice of Christ the son is offered, and who accepts it.

(b) Christ the head of the Church who is both the victim, the priest and the principal agent. He offers himself for us and with us to his heavenly Father for our salvation.

(c) The Holy Spirit who energizes the sacrifice and

(d) Christ mystical body, the Church. United in Christ's offering are members of the Church not only the members still here on earth, but also those already in the glory of heaven.

62. By the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all (CCC, 1326). The Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for the faithful departed who have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified.

### **The Eucharist, the Cross and Real Presence**

63. The Church teaches and believes, based on the Holy Scriptures and guided by the Holy Spirit that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross at Calvary and the Eucharistic sacrifice are one and the

same sacrifice. The victim is the same Christ, the priest is Christ only the manner of offering is different as Christ offers himself through the ministry of priests at the altar in an unbloody manner (CCC, 1367). Christ is truly, substantially present after the consecration both at the altar and in the tabernacle even after Holy Mass, this is what is known and called real presence. Christ invites us always to partake of his body and blood in the Holy Eucharist, but to benefit from the banquet and receive Christ in the Holy Communion, we need to be baptized Catholics and in the state of grace.

64. The Eucharistic Communion has Spiritual and social implications which include: Intimate union with Christ, increase of sanctifying grace, reducing our desire for sin, strengthening our incorporation into the Church – the body of Christ thereby uniting us with one another.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING**

65. As in the earthly life we are subject to suffering illness and death so also in the spiritual life, the new life in Christ which we have received through the sacraments of initiation, can be wounded, weakened and even lost by sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, (cf. Mk 2: 1-12), has willed that his Church will continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation. Therefore, he has given us the sacraments of healing namely: The Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick (cf. CCC, 1421).

#### **6.1 THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION**

66. The Sacrament of reconciliation enables the members of the Church to continually obliterate the gap created between the experience of Baptism and the temptations of earthly life. The Catechism tells us that, “Those who approach the sacrament of penance or reconciliation obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offence committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labours for their conversion.” (CCC, 1422).

67. Conversion and repentance mean essentially the same thing. Conversion does not mean merely changing religious affiliations. It means literally a turn-around, turning one’s heart and will even entire life to God. And repentance does not mean merely feeling sorry, or remorseful. It is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God...a turning away from evil...the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of his grace (cf. CCC, 1431). Jesus message is summarized in two words: repent and believe (Mk 1:15). These are the two parts of conversion, the negative and the positive. Conversion begins with Baptism. It is at Baptism that one renounces evil and gains the forgiveness of sin and the gift of new life. But conversion does not end with Baptism. It is an ongoing process because it is an ongoing need. Christ’s call for conversion continues to resound in the life of individual Christians as well as in the life of the whole Church made up of saints and sinners therefore holy but yet always in need of purification (CCC, 1428). Christ instituted the sacrament of reconciliation for

all her sinful members especially those who fall into grave sin after baptism. Penance heals our wounds and reconciles us with God and the Church.

### **Need for Confession**

68. The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility of them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church, in order to make a new future possible.

We need confession for spiritual and psychological healing. Many non-Catholics are increasingly realizing the need for this sacrament which enables us to confess our sins and be forgiven. Everyone needs to “let it out” to “unload.” The healing words are not forget it but forgive it. We need our sins forgiven not just forgotten; admitted, not denied. Confession is the sacrament of healing and reconciliation.

69. This sacrament has many names. These names correspond to many essential aspects of the Sacrament. Hence, it is called:

- The Sacrament of conversion
- The Sacrament of confession
- The Sacrament of reconciliation
- The Sacrament of Penance
- The Sacrament of forgiveness

This sacrament brings us that divine peace which the world cannot give.

70. By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, Bishops and Priests have power to forgive sins in the name of the Blessed Trinity – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To gain from this sacrament we need contrition of heart or sorrow of the soul and detestation of sin committed as well as confession to a priest. Therefore, one who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and the Church must confess to a priest. And, only priests who have received the faculty to absolve from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of Christ. This sacrament has many spiritual and social benefits.

### **6.2 THE SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

71. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick heartens the ailing Christian and enables him to receive healing of body and soul as well as strengthens him for the final battle with death if the time has come.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “by the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of the priests, the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them. And indeed she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and death of Christ.” (CCC, 1499).

72. This sacrament, like all sacraments, addresses one of the basic aspects of life. It addresses holistic health and wellbeing. “Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life” (CCC, 1500). Christianity like Christ respects the dual nature of the human person. God created the angels to be spirits, but he designed the human person to be a unity of body and soul. Part of Christ’s ministry while on earth was the healing of human bodies, and the Church continues this ministry. Illness and suffering sometimes remind the human person about human finitude, powerlessness and limitation. Sometimes such may lead to despair and distancing of oneself from God but such can also lead to faith experience and discovery of God.

73. Jesus has the power not only to heal but to forgive sins. While on earth he healed many who were sick but did not heal all. Rather, by his passion and death on the cross he gave a new meaning to suffering. The man of faith unites his sickness with the sufferings of Christ whose passion has redemptive value. Our suffering can have redemptive meaning for our sins and the sins of others if we can offer it up and unite it with the sufferings of Christ. In the sacraments especially the anointing of the sick Christ continues to touch us in order to heal us and to unite our anguish with his redemptive passion.

74. It is good to note that any sick person can receive this sacrament. It is not for those at the point of death. It is a sacrament for the sick and can be received several times if the need arises. It is the sacrament of healing which can give us both physical and spiritual healing and strength.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **THE SACRAMENTS AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION – VOCATION TO LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE**

75. Two Sacraments confer a mission of service to the people of God. These sacraments are Holy Orders and Matrimony. The recipients of these sacraments receive the call to leadership among the people of God and the community of God’s children. They are at the service of communion, regeneration and transformation.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are sacraments of Christian initiation. They ground the common vocation of all Christ’s disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world... Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so (CCC, 1533 – 1534). It is a vocation to leadership through service.

#### **7.1 THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS**

76. Holy Orders is the Sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate (CCC, 1536). Holy Orders creates new leaders (deacons, priests, and bishops) to minister to the people of God, and especially lead the continued proclamation of the sacrificial death of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Thus this sacrament is a continuation of the priesthood of Christ which he bestowed upon the Apostles. Through ordination or consecration, the candidate for Holy Orders is incorporated into the priesthood of Christ at one of the three levels: bishopric, priesthood or diaconate.

77. Through baptism all the people of God share in the priesthood of Christ, that is, the common priesthood of the faithful. But through the sacrament of the Holy Orders some men are ordained ministers at the service of the common priesthood. They are called ministerial priests and through them Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. By virtue of this sacrament, the ordained minister acts in the person of Christ as Christ is present to his Church through him. This ministerial priesthood is entirely for service since the sacrament of Holy Orders communicates a “sacred power (*sacra potestas*) which is the authority and power of Christ who came not to be served but to serve.

78. Christ instituted the ministerial priesthood and the Holy Eucharist in the context of paschal sacrifice when at the Last Supper he replaced the lamb of sacrifice with his body and blood to be given up and poured out for the salvation of the world. He then commissioned and ordained the apostles as ministers of the new covenant who will make this sacrifice present till the end of time. The apostles have in turn ordained their successors through the sacrament of Holy Orders to continue this ministry of service. The sacrament of Holy Orders empowers the ministers to represent Christ, as Christ acts through them among his people thus the mission of Christ is continued and perpetuated.

This sacrament provides the Church and the entire children of God with servant– leaders who will continue the mission of the Redeemer.

## 7.2 THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

79. The matrimonial covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament (C.I.C, Can. 1055; CCC, 1601). Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God (CCC, 1602), and therefore in the image of love, since God is love. God’s very first command to them was to marry, to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:22). Scripture also concludes with a vision of the wedding – feast of the lamb (Rev. 19:7; CCC, 1602). From the scripture one can easily conclude that marriage is in God’s plan. Marriage is an image of our ultimate destiny and Heavenly joy. Marriage is the image of the union between Christ and his Church and between God and Israel. God instituted marriage because God is love.

**80. God who created man out of love, also called him to love.** This is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God, who is himself love. Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man (CCC, 1604). Marriage love is meant to be absolute and unfailing. It is a gift of life for the whole of life. Conjugal love has the privilege of totality and indissolubility. It mirrors the love of God.

81. God ordained marriage as he declared that it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18, CCC, 1605). In marriage the complementarity aspect of human nature is evident. Man and woman are created equal in value, different in nature and complementary in purpose.

Marriage is a sacrament. It is a primary example of covenant, a binding relationship based not on feeling nor on any external human law, but on a freely chosen commitment.

**82. Marriage calls for Sacrifice.** Marriage is a share of mutual love from the spouses. Love goes with giving and sacrifice. No marriage can succeed without sacrifice.

**83. Marriage calls for Fidelity.** By its very nature, conjugal love requires fidelity of the spouses. The need for fidelity follows from the essence of marriage which involves mutual self-giving. Inviolable fidelity deepens and sustains marital love.

84. In all the procreation and education of children, sacrificial love of mutual self-giving in marriage as well as fidelity in married life all are directed towards service to others. Ultimately, the Sacrament of marriage is a sacrament at the service of love and Christ-like life of sacrifice among his people.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CHRIST AND THE CHURCH AS PRIMAL SACRAMENTS

85. The institution of the Sacraments by Christ reminds us of the seven sacraments, and the cause-effect relationship already mentioned can give the impression that the sacraments are depersonalized channels of grace. The theologian Edward Schillebeeckx reflects against this emphasis in recalling that the Sacraments are an encounter with God. But this encounter comes from the history of salvation and from the role of Christ in the redemption of man. For Schillebeeckx, “It is in the personal encounter that man finds his salvation” in the order of grace established by God. From the point of view of God, it is revelation, while for the human being, it is religion. But both are sacramental because it is only in some material earthly forms which are sacraments that the human being can access the mysteries revealed by God in his word.

86. This structure of word and sacrament is manifest in the Old Testament. There the people of God, Israel, are familiar with the reality expressed by the declaration: “I will be your God, you will be my people.” This represents an extension of a loving invitation to the people but always with the possibility of responding positively or rejecting the invitation. The revelation that culminated in Christ in reality is better seen as a salvific dialogue, a struggle between “the ever-faithful God and man who resists him.” This constant tussle was resolved by Christ’s incarnation.

As the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus reveals to us the divine proposal of love. And, as man, he accepts it in the name of all of us. It is on account of this acceptance in a vicarious way, for us, that his sacrifice on the cross becomes our redemption. He has become the head of mankind in his Fidelity to God's invitation, and only in union with him, the head, is our own fidelity possible.

87. Christ became man to become Emmanuel, and live and work in contact with his brethren. Since Jesus himself is God, his communication with his brethren is a personal contact with God. "Consequently, the inter-human exchange between Jesus and the men with whom he comes in contact is the sacrament of their encounter with God." (E. Shillebeeckx, in Robert Gleason, (ed.), *A Theology Reader*, p. 242). This encounter required a bodily expression since inter-human relationships can only be made through corporeal signs. However, the human actions of the Christ remain the personal deeds of the Son of God even though these are expressed in human form. These include his miracles, his redemption culminating in the sacrifice of the cross. According to Shillebeeckx:

*These operations of Jesus in their human form are "signs and cause" of the divine grace in such wise that the externally palpable is itself the inner power of salvation in visible form; it is the imparting of a corporal dimension to the event of grace. The encounter of the believer with Christ, the primal sacrament... remains the fundamental act of the Christian religion as a personal communion with the three divine persons. (E. Shillebeeckx, p. 242-243)*

88. Christ thus becomes the primal sacrament because being the second person of the Trinity, God-man, and responding faithfully to the invitation of God, he becomes the head of his followers; relating to them corporally by his incarnation and being vicarious offering for his followers. By fulfilling his roles as God and as man, Christ becomes the pivot of sacramental encounter between God and man. In this interpretation, the sacraments are not mere objects but encounters, first with the glorified Christ and, in him as the second person of the Trinity with the living God.

The above expresses the Christological dimensions of the sacraments. But another important aspect is the ecclesiastical dimension. The Church can be described as the visible historical embodiment of the salvation accomplished by God in Christ. She is also the earthly channel of God's revelation and is both Sacrament and word.

89. By the power of the Holy Spirit she is a living temple and the people of God. Through the action of the Spirit sent by Christ, whatever the visible Church performs in the historical order, is replicated interiorly in the Church and in the souls of the faithful. Consequently, the Church may herself be called a primal sacrament, in as much as she is the "Sacramental Christ", and the recipient of the seven sacraments. The seven Sacraments are therefore basically an operation of the heavenly Christ that is sacramentalized in the visible, authorized operation of the Church. That is why both the power of orders and that of jurisdiction are at work in every sacrament. That is also why the validity of each sacrament depends squarely on whether it is done as an action of the Church; and hence every minister of the sacrament must intend "to do what the Church does."

90. Thus Christ and his Church are called the primal Sacrament. There is no duplication here since the Church is the sacrament of the redeeming Christ on earth, continuing and making effective that

redemptive work which will not cease on account of Christ's ascension. Karl Rahner sees this Sacramental nature as essential, and for him, it is as long as this is realized that the Church achieves its fulfillment.

*Because first of all and independent of the usual idea of a sacrament, we envisage the Church as the fundamental or primal sacrament, and form the root idea of a sacrament in the ordinary sense as an instance of the fullest actualization of the Church's essence as the saving presence of Christ's grace, for the individual, we can in fact obtain from this an understanding of the sacraments in general (A Rahner Reader, p. 281).*

The Theology of the Church as fundamental or primal Sacrament is very pivotal for Rahner, and for him only on the basis of the Church as the Fundamental Sacrament, can the sacramentality of the other sacraments be recognized.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE UNITY OF THE SACRAMENTS

91. The Church at the Council of Trent defined the specific number of the Sacraments as seven. However, this does not detract from their inner unity. We have earlier referred to the teaching that both Christ and his Church are called the primal Sacrament. Christ is presented as the perfect fulfillment of the will of God. Being the second person of the Trinity, and being truly human, he accepts in a perfect manner fidelity to God who invites his people to be his own. In doing so he becomes our head, interceding for us and being a man like us in all things but sin. That the incarnation makes the redeemer true man does not mean that he is no longer God, and thus his communication with his brothers and sisters, their acceptance of God's invitation in him is the sacrament of encounter, and the primal Sacrament in the Christian – Sacramental economy.

92. The Church also stands as the primal sacrament. She is the mystical body of the glorified Lord, presenting to the children of God the fruit of Christ's redemptive actions. "In the profoundest sense it is the Church itself, the people of God, that constitute the primary mysterion, the great sacrament between human and divine." (Herbert Musurillo, p. 251). Christ's unceasing presence to the human being is realized through this Body, (the Church) and men find the means by which they can have access to God. "The Church is thus the great outward sign." Musurillo again presents this primal Sacrament as encompassing the Church and our Saviour: "The entire Church in its union with the Saviour is the great mysterion or Sacramentum, born from the side of Christ on Calvary." (H. Musurillo, p. 274)

93. The unity entailed by the primal Sacrament means in a sense that the Sacraments of the Church are not to be fragmented. They are all partial functions of a single principle and operation, and their effects cannot be understood except as the meager distribution of a vast and comprehensive system. Still when their totality is taken into account, it is not far-fetched to understand how much each of them channels the effect of the atonement, and thus making their causality secondary and derivative.



94. This unity is best seen in the centrality of the Eucharist in the sacramental economy. Since the last super encapsulates the very sacrifice of the cross that bought our redemption, the whole salvific intent of the different and separate Sacraments are realized in the Eucharist where in real terms we encounter Christ in his Sacrifice in an eminently sacramental manner. Hence all other Sacraments are fundamentally linked or rooted in the Eucharist. It is the central mystery around which all other sacraments cluster, invoking the imagery of “a fragmented planet revolving around a central star. Because the Eucharist is clearly the celebration of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, it constitutes the strongest uniting factor in the Church’s sacramental economy.

95. The Sacraments are also strongly united by their Trinitarian character. Christ, who by virtue of his paschal mystery is the primal sacrament is the second person of the Trinity. This work of redemption is wrought by the Holy Spirit, and can thus be described as the gift of the Holy Spirit. But the Sacraments are the principal means by which we are given the spirit as sanctifier. “The Holy Spirit is indeed at work in the Sacraments. The sacramental signs are marvelously fruitful in developing within us the life of Christ precisely because of the Spirit’s all enveloping activity.” (J.H. Miller, Signs of Transformation in Christ, p. 33).

96. The Sacraments are thus the expression of the same reality which is the outpouring of God’s redeeming work in Christ, through the Spirit and by the instrumentality of his body the Church on his faithful children. They are like channels through which the grace of God flows to us. However, this does not detract from their unity, since they are all expressions of the primal Sacrament of encounter with God, and mediated through the primal sacrament, the Church and the mystical body of Christ.

## CHAPTER TEN

### SOME CHALLENGES TO OUR BELIEF IN THE SACRAMENTS

97. In our contemporary society today some aspects of our social life constitute an obstacle to our faith and our belief in the sacraments. Some of these challenges include: Secularism, Relativism, Wrong perception of human nature, Poor understanding of our Faith and Proliferation of churches and doctrines. These and many others constitute problems hostile to our faith.

**98. Secularism:** In simple terms, Secularism can be defined as a system of belief that rejects religion; or the belief that religion should not be part of the affairs of the state or part of public education.

In our present-day society, we are witnessing a form of secularism that denies God any significant role in human history. Such an attitude marginalizes human dependence on God. Some people tend to dismiss as irrelevant moral arguments based on natural law, universal principles or objective truth. Likewise, they are reluctant to embrace the notion of divinity, transcendence, and mystery. This tendency negatively imparts on our appreciation of the value of the sacraments. The atmosphere of secularism erodes faith in God, leading many to believe only in what can be experienced with the senses and explained scientifically. Secularism denies man’s capability to know God or to discern God’s self-revelation as found in the Scriptures, Tradition and Magisterium. This attitude denies the notion of man made in the image of God with eternal destiny.

The effort to distance God from human affairs makes it difficult for the modern man or woman to understand or appreciate the mystery and treasure of the Sacraments.

**99. Relativism:** This is the belief that there is no objective truth. Relativism teaches that morality is relative, People can have different views about what is good and evil; what is right or wrong. It follows that each society or even individual can decide on what is good or evil. What is moral or immoral depends on the individual, the culture or the society involved. In this way for those who go by this theory truth is relative and morality is relative.

This attitude is very deceptive. The belief that there is no objective truth leads people to think that they have their own truth. They can determine how to worship God independent of divine revelation. No man is an Island. Catholics live in the society and they are sometimes affected by these erroneous views. Faith in divine revelation calls for rejection of relativism. Even right reason and common sense suggest that truth and morality cannot be relative. Catholics are called to be firm in their faith and value the mystery of the sacraments.

### **100. Wrong Perception of Human Nature Christian**

Anthropology teaches us the true nature of man. It teaches what God has revealed about origin of the human person, his nature, his sinfulness, vocation, destiny and salvation in Jesus Christ. Influenced by modern atheism, secularism and relativism some people teach humanism without God. They present a society that has no need of God and no role for him. Such a society looks down on Sacraments. But as Catholics we know that God is with us through the Sacraments. We should endeavor to learn our faith, know our faith and live our faith.

### **101. Poor Understanding of Our Faith**

Some Catholics limit their practice of the faith and study of the faith only to weekends. Such an altitude leads to a shallow grounding of our faith. After reception of the sacraments which usually helps us to study our Catechism, we need to continue reading the documents of the Church, attending spiritual retreats, reading the bible and other spiritual books as well as being regular at Mass and other sacraments like reconciliation and Holy Communion. Ongoing catechesis can always assist us as Catholics in the understanding of our faith and practicing our faith without compromise.

### **102. Proliferation of Churches and Doctrines**

Today there are so many new generation churches that preach instant miracles and prosperity. They preach Christ without the cross and assure people of immediate entry into earthly paradise. This negative teaching has led many astray. It has a huge blow on the sacraments.

103. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour who instituted the Sacraments gives us life through the Sacraments, nourishes our lives and abides with us through the sacraments. He gives us all the graces we need for our upkeep and salvation. We should never allow culpable ignorance regarding our faith and religion. We should avoid “religious illiteracy” and “suffering-free”

Christianity. This pastoral letter is an attempt to call on all Catholics to an understanding, practice and commitment to an active sacramental life. The Sacraments are our treasure from Christ.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE SACRAMENTS: OUR WAY TO THE FATHER THROUGH CHRIST

104. Profound understanding of the Sacraments indicate so clearly how the marvelous and redemptive work of Christ eminently opens our way to God the Father, the first person of the Trinity. The totality of Christ's work while on earth was aimed at worshiping his Father. But this worship was in a very special way mediated by the paschal mystery. The Sacraments are all actions of Christ for the glorification of his Father and the salvation of men. But, the greatest, the most central and pivotal of these is that one that makes present his most significant act of redemption, the Eucharist, the Paschal mystery.

105. As glorified, Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is now the accepted sacrifice, the immolated Lamb, but one which now intercedes for us. The glorified Christ in his continued heavenly worship is visibly present in the Church, and primarily in the Eucharist, but also in the other sacraments. In each of these sacraments the pasch of Christ, accepted eternally by the Father operates in us. The Sacraments are thus the means by which the Church, through its own sacramentality brings to fulfillment the redemption accomplished by the Lord. It means that we as believers share Christ's worship of his Father which wrought our redemption and thus share in preeminent way through Christ's intercession and through the Church the fruit of this redemption.

106. The Sacraments inspire in the Christian the spirit of Christianity which is aptly described as the Spirit of maranatha "come Lord Jesus" (Apoc., 22:20). Thus, the encounter with the Lord is not yet perfect. But the expectation of the perfect encounter, inspired by Faith is nourished by corporal contact with the living Lord. Thus, through the Sacraments the Christian experiences an earthly foretaste to the perfect eschatological encounter.

***The Sacraments, therefore, are in fact corporal encounters with the glorified Jesus; and since he is himself the Eschaton (the ultimate), they are a mysterious celebration of the parousia. Especially in the Eucharist do we possess the climax of this encounter. (E. Shillebeeckx, p. 244).***

107. The Sacraments therefore avail us the foretaste of the parousia, since Christ being the ultimate, the eschaton, the faithful, in sacramental encounter are enabled to be in constant contact with the Father through the glorified Christ who sits at his right hand. The Sacraments thus rekindle our expectation for our ultimate end which is to see God face to face and to be like him. Even though for the moment the effects of the Sacraments cannot but be incomplete and partial, they are both physical and real: They look backward to Christ's redemption and forward to the reality of ultimate union with God.

108. Union with God is in fact the ultimate end of the Christian life which is greatly facilitated by the sacramental economy of the Church. The Sacraments are meant to give life, to restore life, to intensify the life of Christ among Christians. Each of the sacraments achieves this end in the particular way indicated in its constitutive sign. This sacramental grace constitutes the immediate

end of every sacramental encounter, but its ultimate end is the glory of which is attached to grace. This entails that the Sacraments make available to us the benefits of the redemptive work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. But the ultimate end is the arrival of the pilgrim in the abode of his Father where he will share the glorification which Christ obtained for us by his redemption.

109. Augustine's doctrine of the symbols brings the ultimacy of the sacramental life to clarity. Augustine sets the system of the Sacraments within the entire context of man's knowledge of God both in the world and the context of the Church. For him, the divine signs are given to human beings in order to know, and it is by their operative grace that men are enabled to live in a new dimension. This new dimension is a supernatural one whose final end is the possession of God.

110. Ultimately, the Sacraments are in a veritable way, our way to God the Father through Christ. They are the means instituted by Christ himself to ensure that the fruit of his redemptive work is received by those who believe in him in accordance with their nature. The signs and symbols of the Sacraments are thus divine instruments that aid human understanding and appreciation of the worship of the Father in consonance with the sanctifying example of Christ himself. But as pilgrims whose final end is not within the temporal dispensation, the earthly encounter with the risen Lord, enabled by the sacraments will lead to eternal fulfillment which entails permanent union with God the Father in His everlasting Kingdom.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **SACRAMENTAL LIFE IN THE NIGERIAN CHURCH**

111. We Christians and more especially Nigerian Catholics should ever remain grateful to God who by his mercy made us sharers in his great sacramental mystery. The successful planting of Christianity in Nigeria during the colonial period made it possible for all of us who are members of God's household to be participants in the worship of God which is the means of our sanctification through sharing in the fruit of Christ's atonement for humanity. The early missionaries came to our country, and sacrificed so much to transmit this great mystery of Christ's redemption that we are today participants in the sacramental dispensation and so obtain the necessary graces for our eventual glorification in the Lord in union with his Father.

112. The Catholic missionaries through effective catechesis were able to instruct and enlighten their faithful in such a way that within relatively short period of time, sacramental life among the Catholic faithfuls became very strongly rooted. This is very easily seen in the eager and fervent participation of the faithful in many sacramental ceremonies. Daily participation in the Eucharistic celebration is becoming more and more habitual among so many Christians; weekly celebration is approaching breaking point in many parishes making it necessary in so many parishes to celebrate many Masses on Sundays and Holy Days in order to accommodate the teeming attendance.

113. Reception of other Sacraments is also witnessing significant increase. The numbers of the faithful who receive the sacrament of Reconciliation in our different parishes continue to increase, making it a very demanding aspect of priestly function in a normal Catholic parish. More and more young couples today see it as a sine qua non that their marital union should begin with the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The effect of this is the increment in the reception of the

Sacrament of initiation and thus constantly increasing the number of Catholic faithfuls. Vocation to the priesthood and religious life indicates the flowering of God's grace in our Church as the Holy Spirit inspires more and more young people to devote their lives to serve God in the priestly ministry and religious life as consecrated persons. While we thank God for the flowering of the Sacramental life in our Church, we should continue to pray for continuous improvement both in terms of number and the quality of the participation in the celebration of sacramental mysteries. We should never take for granted the apparent blooming of Christian life in our Church. We should all rather continue to pray that adherence to the Christian faith and practices result in commensurate improvement of our socio-political-cultural and economic life. In short that our proclamation of Christianity and our participation in the sacramental mysteries influence in very positive ways our earthly life and thus give glory to God the author and terminus of creation.

114. We as a Church should be very wary about the negative influence of some strands of new religious movements on our understanding of the Sacraments. There are some manifestations of Pentecostalism that make almost little or nothing of the Sacraments, erecting themselves as arbiters of God's mystery and his revelation; and making themselves judges of age old, revealed and traditional teachings about the Sacraments and in the process confusing so many innocent faithful. Some others profess magical understanding of the Sacraments whereby the human worshipper believes that he or she can command the intervention of God in miracle seeking sessions. It is important to underline that the Sacraments do not belong to the economy of magic and that their efficacy is very different from magical efficacy where the human agent attempts to coerce divine power for personal ends. The Sacraments are not purveyors of miracles. They are rather grace-filled worship where God enables his children to, so to say, access the fruits of redemption achieved by Christ.

115. We should also be mindful of the possibility of abuses in the celebration of the Sacraments. Suffice it here to mention just one example where the Eucharistic celebration is taken as a locus for raising funds either during project Sundays or during annual harvests. The practice is that in such occasions Eucharistic celebrations become virtually fund-raising activities inserted disproportionately within the sermon in which participants are invited to make open by announcement their donations or offerings. The necessity of funds in the Church does not justify such an abuse or instrumentalization of the Holy Eucharistic celebration which is the quintessence of all the Sacraments. The Sacraments should never be abused.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **LEARNING AT THE SCHOOL OF MARY: SIGN OF GOD'S MATERNAL PRESENCE**

116. In the words of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, "Among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his mother... This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own pilgrimage of Faith." (Rosarium Virgins Mariae, no. 14).

We have learnt that the sacraments are actions of Christ; they are outward signs of inward grace... But we need faith to perceive and believe in the signs. We need faith to go beyond the signs to what they signify.

117. Mary is a model of faith in this regard. Mary believed in the physical, human Jesus her son as equally son of God, son of the Most High as revealed to her by the Angel (cf. Lk. 1:36). Mary believed in Jesus as a sign or sacrament of divine presence. We can learn from Mary to believe in divine signs and actions which are manifested in the sacraments.

118. God our Eternal Father who has both paternal and maternal care for his children gave us a mother in Mary through Christ. Thus, at the foot of the cross Jesus gave us Mary as our mother when he said to Mary, behold your son and to John the Apostle, behold your mother (Jn. 19: 26-27). The Apostle here represents all the followers of Christ. Therefore, through Mary we enjoy a privileged maternal care. In this way Mary becomes a sign or “Sacrament” of God’s maternal care. No wonder prompted by the Holy Spirit Mary could say, “From this day forward, all generations will call me blessed” (Lk. 1:48). Truly Mary is blessed and we can see in her an icon, a sign of divine maternal presence since we can also be blessed through her.

## CONCLUSION

### A CALL TO SACRAMENTAL EXISTENCE

119. We can learn from Mary to make our lives a sign of God’s blessings on those around us. Make your life an act of worship pleasing to God: An external expression or visible sign of God’s blessings on his people.

120. If we believe in the sacraments and allow the Sacraments we receive to influence us, we shall live sacramental existence. Sacraments are actions of Christ and Sacramental existence involves gratitude and stewardship. Gratitude leads one to a profound appreciation of human existence as a gift to be received and a gift to make. It inspires one to see the created world and all the blessings therein as a sign pointing to something better and greater. Sacramental existence makes our life a continuous worship to God and a blessing or a sign of God’s presence to his people.

## PRAYER

121. Lord Our Lord, you give your children the Sacraments so that even in their earthly pilgrimage, they may already be sustained and strengthened by the fruit of Christ’s redemption. Grant that our participation in the celebration of the Sacraments may enable us to live in a manner worthy of our calling, and so be ever prepared for eternal union with you. Through Christ Our Lord! Amen.

**Given in Onitsha, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, on 26th February,  
Ash Wednesday, in the year of our Lord 2020**

**MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE Archbishop of Onitsha**