

most perfect Sacrament of all – Jesus. To meet that man was to meet God. God communicates himself to us at our level. He continues to do so.

The apostles were never baptised because their “baptism” was meeting Jesus; they were called and followed him. Paul was baptised because he didn’t meet Jesus the man. So too, the apostles didn’t have to go to Communion every week. Their “communion” was in sharing meals with Jesus. But do you remember the woman who wept over Jesus’ feet, and cleaned them with her hair? She was a sinner. Yet what enabled her to experience God’s love and mercy in Jesus was her faith. What enables us to encounter him is faith and understanding.

In the sacraments, God is truly and fully present, which is why the sacramental life of the Church must be the centre of our faith.

THE FOOD GOD

God decided to visit the earth so he sent an angel to survey the situation prior to his visit



The angel returned with his report. “Most of them lack food” he said, “and most of them lack employment”.

God said, “Then I shall become incarnate in the form of food for the hungry and work for the unemployed”.

SACRAMENTS AND FAITH



We often hear priests mention Sacraments and their importance. Why are they so special in the Catholic Church? It is this that we will be looking at, as well as the importance of faith.

SACRAMENTS AS SIGNS

Sacraments, we are told, are about signs, so it's worth considering the importance of signs. Without signs we cannot communicate. Even words are signs that express our feelings, our needs, our thoughts and so on. On the other hand, a sign can be an image like a traffic sign or a noise like a siren.



Bowing is a sign of respect; laughing and kissing are signs too. They show our mood or our feelings for another person. However, they can also **cause** us to feel that way. They cause what they signify.

Let's take an example; kissing (why not!!). When you kiss your wife or husband, one of your parents or your child, it is a **sign** of your love. Holding hands is too. Yet it's more than just a sign; because if we stop kissing, never hold hands, give presents or show signs of love, then that love can die. Although they are only signs they make that relationship what it is. This is a very important point in understanding sacraments.

Our relationship with God needs signs because we are human. Unless the love in our relationship with God finds expressions it could die or never begin. We need to show signs of our love for God – we need God to show signs of his love for us.

This happens in the Sacraments. In the Sacraments God communicates himself to us. In every-day life we receive things through touch, smell, sight, taste and hearing. God uses these channels for giving himself fully to us. We can feel his love like soothing oil and life-giving water; we see God in the love and support of the community around us; God speaks to us in his Word and we feed on him in the bread and wine of eternal life; we can actually hear his words of forgiveness spoken to us.

We also show signs of our love for God: the sign of the Cross, kneeling, genuflection, our offering, flowers, fasting and so on.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

However, it's no good making rude gestures to a blind person or shouting at someone who is deaf. Much of the effect is lost. There are ways in which we can be deaf or blind to the things of God. This includes the Sacraments. In fact Jesus himself often accused people of this sort of blindness (Mtt 13:15; 16:11)

But think also of those men, women and children who are half-hearted about their faith; maybe they always arrive late for Church and leave early. They attend Mass shrug their shoulders and go home. Unless we try to understand the signs in the Sacraments, at best we will miss out on a lot, at worst it will become meaningless. So much of the Church's life is about signs that become less effective if we don't fully appreciate their meaning.



Why do we use incense? Candles? Bless ourselves with Holy Water?

What's the point of going into a box, telling some man your sins and then saying 3 Hail Marys?

Why is that man in the white dress dipping that poor baby in cold water, and their parents smiling?

Why does the priest rub oil on that dying woman's hands?

Why is the priest up there giving out bits of white bread and keeping all the wine to himself?

Why sing? It only makes Mass longer! Why no more Latin? Why don't they build Churches the same shape as they used to?

All these things are part of understanding what sacraments are. To be open to what these signs express is to be open to God. But more. Remember they cause what they signify. They build on **faith** and deepen our relationship with God. With faith and understanding Sacraments open us up to God.

That brings us to what Sacraments are. They are not things!" - they are encounters with God. We see that nowhere better than in the greatest and