The Sacraments

* We have done a whole series on the sacraments.
  + If you are looking for a comprehensive treatment of Catholic doctrine on the subject of the sacraments, check that series out.
  + This is not that…
* Here we are looking at sacraments in general, and the five sacraments we did not cover in the last episode from an apologetic p.o.v.
  + Meaning, we are defending the Catholic doctrine on the subject from those who deny its veracity.

Sacraments in General

* A visible sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace.
  + There is a ceremony that can be perceived by the senses through which, by the command of Jesus Christ, grace is conferred on the soul.
* The fruits of Redemption have to be communicated to souls throughout time and space.
  + To accomplish this, Jesus Christ founded a Church.
    - Note that in the Gospels, He speaks about His Church constantly.
    - He never once mentions reading the Bible and the only record we have of Him writing is on the ground with His finger…
  + To this Church, He left channels of grace that we call sacraments.
    - By these means, we are able to receive forgiveness of our sins and the grace we need to save our souls.
    - If grace is communicated directly, w/o any action of the Church, why was Our Lord so insistent on His Church?
    - If there is no determined means of receiving this grace, how would we know that we had done so?
* Like her divine Founder, the Church has a twofold nature: human and divine
  + Visible and invisible.
  + Likewise, we have a spiritual nature but a physical body.
  + The nature of the Church and here sacraments reflect these realities.
    - The Church ministers to the interior, spiritual element through the agency of the exterior, the visible, the physical.
  + So, the sacraments are exterior signs of inward grace.
    - Clear manifestations in an external manner of the grace God confers upon the soul.
* Only Jesus Christ gives grace.
  + Thus, the sacraments must be instituted by Our Lord.
    - He left many of the details to the determination of His Church.
  + But the Church cannot invent or suppress sacraments.
* Constant Tradition tells us that there are 7.
  + Agreement between Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox on this subject.
  + The Sacraments have all been in use since the beginning.
* Note that we will speak of the Scriptural and historical record regarding the sacraments, but the most important thing is the authority of the Church.
  + Founded by Jesus Christ, protected from essential errors.
  + We can project our own ideas about the sacraments on to the perennial practice of the Church, but who cares?
  + If you acknowledge that Jesus Christ founded a visible Church, there is only on candidate to be that Church.
  + If you accept that Church, the doctrine of the sacraments is a pretty easy sell.

Baptism

* “Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”
* Pretty obvious that this is something important.
  + “Jesus answered: Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”
* Immersion, sprinkling, pouring (infusion)
  + Immersion more common in the early centuries.
  + Seems unlikely that the jailer baptized in Phillipi could have been baptized by immersion.
  + Acts of the martyrs often refer to baptism in prisons.
  + Baptism by pouring was considered valid by St. Cyprian in the 3rd c.
* Infant Baptism
  + Origen, St. Cyprian, and St. Augustine all refer to the practice of infant baptism. Origen and St. Augustine explicitly state that it was of Apostolic institution.

Confirmation

* Sacrament in which the bishop imposes his hands on and anoints, the head of the candidate and prays.
  + Baptized persons receive a new strength to live an upright Christian life and to defend the faith through a fresh reception of the Holy Ghost.
* Called confirmation because it strengthens the soul.
* Sometimes called the laying of hands because this is part of the matter of the sacrament.
  + “Now when the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. For he was not as yet come upon any of them; but they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”
* Clearly distinct from baptism.
* Abundant testimony of the Fathers regarding Confirmation:
  + Tertullian (2nd c.) refers explicitly to both anointing and the imposition of hands.
  + St. Cyprian: “…by our prayer and the imposition of hands, they receive the Holy Ghost…”
  + Celebrated in all the Eastern churches separated from Rome – some of them since the 4th c.

Penance

* Primary purpose of Jesus Christ’ mission on earth was to reconcile sinners to their God.
  + Our Lord received and ate with sinners.
  + He pardoned Mary Magdalene and the woman taken in adultery.
  + He tells the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and especially the Prodigal Son.
* He offers assurance to those who are repentant that their sins have been forgiven.
  + The man sick of the palsy: “Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy: Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say: Arise, take up thy bed, and walk? 10 But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say to thee: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house.”
  + Demonstrates His power to forgive sins.
* The Church has been founded to continue Christ’s mission on earth.
  + Thus, Christ passes the power of forgiving sins on to His Apostles.
    - Clear and obvious from Scripture.
    - “Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.” Mt. 18, 18
    - “As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.” John 20.21-23
      * Sent like Jesus Christ, sent to reconcile sinners to God.
      * Not just announcing forgiveness, “whose sins ***you*** shall forgive…”
    - How much clearer and more literal could He be?
  + Is it possible that this power was given only to the Apostles?
    - That once they were dead, no one had the power to forgive sins.
    - This has been suggested by some Protestant opponents of the sacrament of Penance.
    - What evidence is there in Scripture for this contention?
    - This power to forgive sins belongs to their mission of continuing the work of Jesus Christ – they will preach, teach, baptize, absolve from sin
    - Further, Jesus certainly did not limit the benefit of an assurance of forgiveness to the people of single generation!
  + Note that the power is not conferred indiscriminately on all the followers of Christ, but only on the Apostles, the hierarchy that He established for His Church.
* The perennial practice of the Church.
  + “And many of them that believed, came confessing and declaring their deeds.” Acts 19.18
  + “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.” 1 John 1.9
  + St. Augustine: “Let no one say to himself, I do penance to God in private: I do it before God. Is it, then, in vain that Christ has said, ‘Whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven?’ Is it in vain that the keys have been given to the Church? Do we make void the Gospel, void the words of Christ?”
    - God could have chosen a different method for forgiving sinners, but He chose this one.
    - He did not allow the remission of sins to remain in the realm of subjectivity and fickle human emotion.
  + St. Ambrose rebukes the Novatian heretics, who, “professed to show reverence to the Lord by reserving to Him alone the power of forgiving sins. Greater wrong could not be done than what they do in seeking to rescind His commands and fling back the office He bestowed… The Church obeys Him in both respects, by binding sin and by loosing it; for the Lord willed that for both the power should be equal.”
    - He also teaches that this power pertains to the priesthood: “It seemed impossible that sins should be forgiven through penance: Christ granted this to the Apostles and from the Apostles, it has been transmitted to the office of priests.”

Extreme Unction

* The Apostle St. James refers to this sacrament in his epistle: “Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man: and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.”
  + Again, awfully straightforward…
  + This is THE scriptural basis for the sacrament.
* Constant Tradition of the Church
  + Origen speaks of it in his commentary on Leviticus, making direct reference to the Epistle of St. James.
  + St. John Chrysostom does the same thing in his treatise on the priesthood.
  + Pope Innocent I wrote a letter in 416 to Decentius, the Bishop of Gubbio, in which he invokes St. James in support of Extreme Unction being a sacrament like Penance or the Eucharist.
  + The ancient sacramentaries have rituals for administering this sacrament, as well as for blessing the oil used in it.
  + All the schismatic Orientals, some of them separated from Rome since the 4th or 5th c. count this anointing among their sacraments.

Marriage

* Our Lord speaks quite explicitly about marriage: “And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery.”
  + We might ask our Protestant friends if their views about marriage and divorce are in line with those of Jesus Christ.
  + Hard to imagine how you can find permission for divorce in those words…
* St. Paul has strong things to say, too.
  + “Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He is the saviour of his body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it.
    - St. Paul likens the union of man and wife to the union of Christ and the Church.
    - Thus, it is a sacred sign, something that transcends the merely natural.
  + St. Augustine refers to this passage from St. Paul to prove that marriage is a sacrament.
  + And we have OLJC Himself declaring its unity and indissolubility.
* Up to the 5th c., the teaching about the sacramentality of marriage was implicit.
  + But, the Fathers were teaching
    - That marriage was sanctified by Christ
      * St. Ambrose: “Marriage is sanctified by Christ.”
    - Marriage is a sacred rite confided to the Church:
      * St. Ignatius writing to St. Polycarp: “Those who marry should be united with the bishop’s approval, so that the marriage may follow God’s will and not merely the prompting of the flesh.”
      * Tertullian: “How shall we ever be able adequately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the Sacrifice strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, at which angels are present as witnesses, and to which the Father gives His consent?”
* Since the 5th c. (which is more than a thousand years closer to the time of Christ that the 16th…)
  + The Fathers, the liturgy, and even art testify to the Church’s belief that marriage is a sacrament.
  + St. Augustine notably points out that there are 3 goods of marriage: children, fidelity, and sacrament.
  + Once again, all the Eastern rites who are not in union w/ Rome recognize the sacramentality of marriage.

This treatment is a bit cursory.

* Again, for more information on the individual sacraments, check out our series on the sacraments.
* We have demonstrated that the existence of 7 sacraments is firmly founded in Scripture and demonstrable from the ancient practice of the Church.
* But it does come down to the authority of the Church.
  + Two people can look at the same passage of Scripture and one says that this proves the existence of a sacrament and the other says it doesn’t.
    - Who decides?
    - The authority established by Christ.
    - The same authority that determined which books are in the Bible.
  + Everything hinges on the foundation of the Church by Jesus Christ.