

Sacraments: An Overview

Lesson # 19 of 27

Scripture/Memory Verse

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us..” (1 John 1:1-2)

Lesson Goals & Objectives

Goal

- To communicate to students the sacramental principle that God meets us “where we are” in the Word made Flesh (Incarnation), *and* continues to do so in a similar manner in the sacraments. To enable students, through a deeper understanding of the sacraments, to participate more fully in the sacramental life of the Church.

Objective

- Students review the scriptural witness to the Incarnation and then come to understand how the Incarnation relates to the sacraments as also being an “incarnational” reality.
- The students will be able to recite the formal definition of a sacrament, and explain what the Catechism teaches about the role each of the sacraments in our lives.

Introduction and Background for the Teacher

1) Definition of Sacrament

A sacrament is an “outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”

2) Sacraments and the Incarnation

The Sacraments derive from the fact of the Incarnation, in which the Word, which was in the beginning *with* God and *was* God, became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-2, 14): that is, the human/divine Person, Jesus Christ. (Reference Lessons 5 and 6) As John tells us, “no one has seen God,” but Jesus has made God known and present to us in a tangible manner that we could see and touch. He meets us on our own ground – as one of us. In the sacraments, the incarnate and risen Lord continues to meet us on our own ground in ways we can see and touch.

3) “Visible Words”

Archbishop Donald Coggan used to say, “Anglicanism is ‘bifocal’; we have the “*verba audibilia*” which means, the Word that is heard, and the “*verba visibilia*” which means, the Word that is seen – that is, the sacraments.

We are embodied beings; we don't just live in our minds and intellects, we live in bodies. We don't just have thoughts, we have feelings. We don't just think, we feel and touch, hear and smell.

The Epistle to the Hebrews (1:1-2) says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." This means not just that God spoke through Jesus of Nazareth, as he did through the prophets, but that the Son, as the Living Word, was Himself the tangible speech or utterance of the Father in time and space. In the Incarnation, God's Word becomes visible.

In the same way God meets us as embodied beings in the sacraments, which function as "visible words" and communicate the Living Word of God in a form that is different from the "spoken word" of Scripture.

verba audibilia
"the word that is heard,"
(Scripture, preaching)

verba visibilia
"the word that is seen"
(sacraments, liturgy)

4) Sacraments as Symbols

Sacraments are signs that "communicate what they signify." **Article XXV** says:

Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him. (*Book of Common Prayer*, pg. 872)

This article, which is at the heart of Anglican teaching on the sacraments, stresses 1) that what the outward and visible signs point to is the saving work of Christ, but also 2) that the signs communicate that saving work in our lives "by which he doth work invisibly in us." Sacraments are "effective." That is, they accomplish the ministration of God's Grace to us.

5) The Number of Sacraments

Until the 15th century, there was no formal classification of the number of sacraments. In the early church, many facets of the Church's practice were known as sacraments. The inner logic of this lies in the fact that apart from the specific sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, the Church over all has a sacramental character – since it is the Body of Christ and visible extension of the Incarnation in time and space. Whatever the Church does is "sacramental."

Since the Council of Florence in 1439, the Roman Catholic Church has identified seven sacraments: 1. Baptism, 2. Eucharist, 3. Confirmation, 4. Penance (now also called Reconciliation), 5. Holy Orders (Ordination), 6. Holy Matrimony, and 7. Extreme Unction (now called Anointing of the Sick).

Anglicanism distinguishes Baptism and Eucharist as "sacraments of the Gospel" because they are specifically identified as being commanded by Jesus Christ in the holy Gospels. Anglicans traditionally have not regarded the other five as sacraments in quite the same sense, although the *Book of Common Prayer* has always made provision for their honored and continued use. Article XXV describes these five as "states of life allowed in the Scriptures."

Q. What are the two great sacraments of the Gospel?

A. The two great sacraments given by Christ to his Church are Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

(*"The Catechism," Book of Common Prayer*)

"Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not like nature of

Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.” (BCP, p. 872)

The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* defines these five as “sacramental rites,” and lists them under the categories of “Pastoral Offices” and “Episcopal Services.”

Materials Needed for Lesson

- Pictures for the sign activity (Appendix)
- Book of Common Prayer

Opening Prayer (5 minutes) Proper 15, BCP, 232:

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of this redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
Amen.

(You may also give the students an opportunity to offer their own prayers.)

Introductory Activity (5 – 10 minutes)

Signs

- A. Show students pictures of signs (see Appendix 1, but also find some of your own) and have them identify them — some could be funny, if possible. (examples: Hospital sign, Watch out for Deer; Children Playing, etc.) Take about the nature of signs and symbols.



- B. Show students pictures (photographs or paintings) of human faces with a variety of expressions. Ask what inner emotions and attitudes these faces seem to convey. Introduce the idea that outward and visible signs can communicate inward realities.

Lesson (20 – 30 minutes)

1) The Incarnation

- A. The students will read **John 1:1-5, 14-18**. Remind them that they have already read this passage during the lesson on the Trinity, so they should know who the “Word” is that was “in the beginning with God” and “was God.” But now we focus on the fact that the Word was “made flesh” in the Person of Jesus Christ.
- B. Read **1 John 1-3**. Draw attention to the tangible characteristics of John’s recollection: “that which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we *looked upon* and have *touched* with our hands...made manifest...”
- C. (Optional) Play for your students Joan Osborne’s song the song, “One of Us.” (You can download from iTunes – or at least show them the lyrics from the Appendix to this lesson.) It is a slightly mocking but also spiritually yearning statement that asks, “What if God became one of us” – which of course, He has in Jesus Christ. Elicit their reactions to the song, and use it as a way to speak about how God really has shared in our essential humanity in the Incarnation. Jesus is a real Person.
- D. Discuss the Incarnation and the way in which God meets us on our own level, as physical beings in material space and time. Help them to see that God continues to meet us on our own level and come into the sphere of our own experience by means of outward and visible signs that we call “sacraments.”

2. What are the Sacraments? Turn to page 857 in the *Book of Common Prayer*, for the section of the catechism entitled “The Sacraments.”

- A. Pick a leader to read each of the three questions, and have everyone else answer them. (They can answer in unison, or you can pick separate individuals to ask and answers the three questions).
- B. Discussion should focus on the meaning of a sacrament.

3. Sacraments in the Anglican Tradition: In the Catechism the students will read question 2 (again) on pages 858, and then the whole section entitled, “**Other Sacramental Rites**.” Discuss each and show how the sacraments (and “sacramental rites”) bring God’s grace into different phases our lives. Have them go through the prayer book and find each of these seven rites. (*Don’t give them the locations unless they have trouble. They are listed below.*)

I. Sacraments of the Gospel

Baptism, *page 299*

Eucharist, *pages 323 and 355*

II. Sacramental Rites

A. Pastoral Offices

Holy Matrimony, *page 423*

Reconciliation of a Penitent, *page 447*

Anointing of the Sick, *page 455*

B. Episcopal Services

Confirmation, *page 413*

Ordination, *page 511*

Reflection: (5 – 10 minutes)

Ask the students to identify some sacraments or “sacramental rites” that they have already received. They should identify Baptism and Holy Communion; they may also identify Reconciliation and Anointing for Healing. Older adults may identify Matrimony as well. Give them some time to discuss what receiving these sacraments has meant in their lives.

Take-Home Activity: (5 min.)

Memorize the definition of a sacrament: ***“A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”*** Each student should be able to repeat this definition at the beginning of the next class.

Closing Prayer: (5 min.)

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

(Give the students time to offer their own prayers, concerns and thanksgivings.)

Scripture References

- John 1:1-18
- Hebrews 1:1-3
- 1 John 1:1-3

Resources

- [John Macquarrie](#), *A Guide to the Sacraments*, Continuum Press
- Charles P. Price, Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living*, Church Publishing Company
- Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer*, Morehouse
- [James F. White](#), *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*, Abingdon Press

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Appendix 1: Signs



Appendix 2: Lyrics to “One of us,” by Joan Osborne(see also:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4CRkpBGQzU>)

If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to his face
If you were faced with him in all his glory
What would you ask if you had just one question
And yeah yeah God is great yeah yeah God is good
yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah
What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home
If God had a face what would it look like
And would you want to see
If seeing meant that you would have to believe
In things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets
And yeah yeah God is great yeah yeah God is good
yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah
What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home
He's trying to make his way home
Back up to heaven all alone
Nobody calling on the phone
Except for the Pope maybe in Rome
And yeah yeah God is great yeah yeah God is good
yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah
What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home
Just trying to make his way home
Like a holy rolling stone
Back up to heaven all alone
Just trying to make his way home
Nobody calling on the phone
Except for the pope maybe in Rome