From the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* [CSL]

59. The purpose of the sacraments is to make people holy, to build up the Body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; but being signs they also have a teaching function. 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 disposes the faithful most effectively to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God rightly, and to practice charity.

60. The Church has, in addition, instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs bearing a kind of resemblance to the sacraments: they signify effects, particularly of a spiritual kind, that are obtained through the Church's intercession. They dispose people to receive the chief effect of the sacraments and they make holy various occasions in human life.

61. Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful, the effect of the liturgy of the **sacraments and sacramentals** is that almost every event in their lives is made holy by divine grace that flows from the paschal mystery of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection, the fount from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. The liturgy means also that there is hardly any proper use of material things that cannot thus be directed toward human sanctification and the praise of God.
1. Prepare by reviewing pages 1, 2, and 3 of this booklet in silence
2. Begin with sung prayer: “Christ Has Promised to Be Present’ Whitney / STUTTGART or another song
3. View the corresponding short video – discuss insights – gather questions for more study
4. End with the “Prayer Used before Every Session of the Second Vatican Council”

Insights from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* [CSL]

1. Rev. Gilbert Ostdiek, OFM says: “Sacraments are privileged moments of what is a broader design of how God works with us through the things of this world….”

2. Rev. Paul Turner says: “The principle of sacramentality is that we can experience God right now under certain signs.” Seven Sacraments are “ways in which we meet Christ more profoundly. Not that we don’t meet him in other ways….”

3. Mary Collins, OSB says: “We are surrounded by the gifts of God.” The natural elements of water, wheat and wine transformed, etc. “invite us to see in them the goodness of God…[and] the use we make of them…point us to the mystery of Christ.”

How do I encounter God in this holy world filled with holy things and holy people?

4. The narrator says: “As Catholics we recognize the mystery of Christ in the physical world. Through the Sacraments, we gain special access to that mystery.”

5. Rev. Jan Michael Joncas says: “The sign [of Eucharist] is the sign of consumption…about nourishment, talking about eating and drinking in the Kingdom of God.”

How does this affect my thinking and practice of reception of Holy Communion?

6. The narrator says: “The fullness of sign is not limited to the seven Sacraments. The vision of the CSL was the development of a sacramental world view in which Christ’s presence is found in all of creation.”

How have I seen or heard or touched or tasted or smelled the presence of Christ this past week? How does this enrich my appreciation of a sacramental world?
7. Rev. Jan Michael Joncas says: “We see the world as radiant with the presence of God.”

What sign have I experienced of God’s benevolent presence?

8. Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ says: “Because of the Incarnation, that affected the transubstantiation of the entire world….everything, in fact, is sacrament.”

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**Sacrament:** An efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit (1131, 774). The sacraments (called “mysteries” in the Eastern Churches) are seven in number: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance or Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony (1210). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

**Sacraments of Healing:** Designation given to the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, pg. 527

**Sacraments of Initiation:** Designation given to those Sacraments that bring a person into membership in the Church – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist. *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, pg. 527

**Sacraments at the Service of Communion:** The term *communion* refers to the Community of the Church. Holy Orders and Matrimony are the Sacraments at the Service of Communion (the community of the Church). This means they are primarily directed toward the salvation of others. If they benefit the personal salvation of the ordained or married person, it is through service to others that this happens. *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, pg. 527

**Sacramentals:** Sacred signs authorized for use by the Church that bring about some spiritual effect or occasion a personal encounter with the grace of Christ, apart from the seven liturgical signs of the Church that have been designated as ‘sacraments’. *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*, Richard Gaillardetz and Catherine Clifford, page 5

**On eating and drinking Eucharist:** An excerpt from the preaching of Bishop George Lucas, 28 May 2000, part of a seven-part series on the Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church:

“Our Catholic tradition holds very clearly that Jesus is fully, really present under both the form of bread and the form of wine. The risen Jesus can neither be divided up nor diminished. It is never required for an individual to receive the Eucharist under both species or forms – in fact, sometimes it is impossible. At the same time, under normal circumstances – at a parish Mass, for instance – all who can are encouraged to share in the cup as well as the host. This is in response to the invitation of Jesus himself to ‘take and eat’ and ‘take and drink.’

“We might look at it this way. Jesus is no more present to us whether we communicate under one form or both, but, by our action, we are making ourselves more present to him. And when we are more fully disposed, more ‘present,’ we give grace a more fertile spot to take root and grow.

“….Let us not be shy about accepting the Lord’s own invitation to eat the bread of life and drink the cup of salvation.”
“The purpose of the sacraments is to make people holy”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 59)

What is a sacrament?
A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. And why does Christ pour out grace on his people in this way? To make them holy. Through the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—Christ forms a holy people, seals them with his Holy Spirit, and nourishes them, day by day, with his Body and Blood. Through the sacraments of healing—Penance and the Anointing of the Sick—he makes them whole when they are sick in spirit or body. And through the sacraments of vocation—Marriage and Holy Orders—he chooses them to be witnesses to his love in the Church and in the world. Some sacraments are received only once in a lifetime, but the sacraments of Eucharist and Penance can, and should, be received again and again. Through the sacraments, Christ touches us with his grace, and makes us holy.
“The sacraments . . . nourish, strengthen, and express [faith]”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 59)

The sacraments of the Church confer grace through words and visible signs. They “bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1131). But there is more. The sacraments also “nourish, strengthen, and express” faith. In other words, the way the sacrament is celebrated—the words, prayers, and ritual gestures—have a power to teach us, and to change us, in a way no explanation ever could. That is why the Sacrament of Baptism can take place in the midst of the Sunday Mass. The elements of the rite—the renunciation of sin and the profession of faith, the pouring of water, the white garment, the lighted candle, and the anointing with sacred Chrism—speak so powerfully of what Baptism is about, and reignite in all present the desire to live the Baptism we have received, and to share with others the faith we profess.

SACRAMENTAL SIGNS:
LIVING PROOF OF GRACE

by Eliot Kapitan

My father’s words were powerful. Sometimes they were kind, sometimes forceful, sometimes very funny. But they were always clear. “Company is coming. Mom will want to show them the house.” My room got cleaned. “The grass is getting pretty high.” It was mowed by the end of the day. “Don’t ever do that again.” I didn’t (not anytime soon, at least). “I need you in the grocery store on Saturday.” I was there, apron on, 10 minutes ahead of time.

The words were clear. The response was quick, appropriate, and equally clear.

HOW THE CHURCH PRAYS

The Sacraments are also pretty clear to faithful people. The sacramental matter (ritual action) and form (ritual words) clearly delineate what both the Church and Christ are up to in the lives of believers. During the Vigil in the holy night of Easter, after processing from light (the new fire) to Light (the Illumined One), after savoring again the great stories of faith proclaimed for our hearing (the Liturgy of the Word) and salvation (by the living Word), we bless water.

Father,
you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power....

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, no. 222.

What follows this blessing of water are professing faith, renouncing sin, washing in the saving waters of Baptism, and clothing in the garment of Christ. Then Confirmation. Then Holy Eucharist.

WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES BY PRAYING

What the Church proclaims about Baptism on that holy night of Easter is what it believes about every Sacrament. Here is the short list.

- **GRACE:** It is gift, it is unearned, and it is from God. We also know from our broader Tradition that “grace” is another way to say “God’s life within”. That presence of God and Christ is proclaimed in other ways: Emmanuel (God-with-us); incarnation (God taking on our flesh, born like us in all things but sin); as well as sanctifying, sacramental, and actual grace.

- **SACRAMENTAL SIGNS:** They are efficacious and deliver what they promise. We also know from our broader Tradition that all “Sacraments” entrusted to the Church begin in Christ and fulfill what is promised because of his action. They are Sacraments of faith because they not only presuppose faith but also nourish, strengthen, and express it [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 59].

- **UNSEEN POWER:** It points to something bigger than any of us and all of us. We also know from our broader Tradition that this is “mystery” rooted in the dead but risen Jesus Christ the Lord. The Church even counts the ways that Christ is present in his Church, especially in the celebration of Liturgy – in Mass, in the minister, in the Eucharistic elements, in the Sacraments, in his word, and in the praying and singing Church [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 7].

This article first appeared in *Ministry & Liturgy* magazine, March 2008 [35:2], page 44.
WHAT THE CHURCH LEARNS BY BELIEVING

Everything spoken calls for response. Everything proclaimed in the word and work of sacred ritual calls for response. Everything proclaimed by the spoken and living Word who is Christ calls for faithful response. The Church blesses things so that holy people are blessed.

- **WATER**: to be new in Christ.
- **OIL**: to be strengthened.
- **BREAD AND WINE**: to be Body and Blood, to be Christ.

IN SUMMARY

Sacramental signs indeed flood us with grace. These visible sacramental words and actions help us glimpse what is unseen and who is unseen — but ever present, ever active in our lives. May our responses be quick, appropriate, and clear.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins the section on the Church’s Sacraments with this truth: “The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments” [no. 1113]. It then provides a summary of sacramental theology and the seven sacraments [nos. 1113-1134] and the distinctive nature of each [nos. 1210-1666]. See also the definition of “Sacrament” in the glossary.

Father Lawrence Mick has revised his *Understanding Sacraments Today* (Liturgical Press, 2006). In the preface, he lays out eight basic principles for understanding all Sacraments beginning “sacraments are human activities” and ending “sacraments form us for mission.” These principles expand on the grace-sign-power of which the blessing of water before Baptism sings.

Music helps us sing clearly of Christ’s presence in our lives and our ever faithful response. Here are two songs that proclaim sacramental presence.

- “Alleluia! Sing to Jesus.” Text: Revelation 5:9; William C. Dix, 1837-1898. Tune: HYFRYDOL, 8 7 8 7 D; Rowland H. Prichard, 1811-1887.
- “Christ Is the King!” Text: George K. A. Bell, 1883-1958, alt., © Oxford University Press. Tune: GELOBT SEI GOTT, 888 with alleluias; Melchior Vulpius, c. 1560-1616.

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Elliot Kapitan is the director for the Office for Worship and the Catechumenate in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.
PRAYING AND BELIEVING:
FUNDAMENTAL RULES
FOR FAITH

by Eliot Kapitan

Developing and maintaining habits is
life-long. Good habits affect life in positive
ways. They often reflect important values
and shape fundamental beliefs.

Some examples include the
following: Caressing infants builds up trust
and self-esteem in them and bonds adult to
child. Treating children with respect gives
them skills in relating with others. Flossing
and brushing maintains strong teeth.
Healthy eating improves cholesterol levels.
Regular exercise lowers diabetes and
improves stamina. Reading expands the
mind.

Good habits can be hard work. They
can even be boring. But they are always
worth the effort.

HOW THE CHURCH PRAYS

The Church has a wealth of good
habits surrounding prayer and Liturgy.
From a very young age, these habits teach
us to pray every day – even throughout the
day. They teach us to give thanks for the
food we eat. They teach us to name God in
all of life and for every good thing. They
teach us that life is gift and what we have is
blessing. They teach us how to be Church.
They teach us what redemption by the dead
but risen Christ means. They teach us to
pray first and then set about the work or
meeting at hand.

In developing the habit of keeping
Sunday as the Lord’s Day, for example, we
come to know and believe many things.
They include: In eating and drinking the
Body and Blood of Christ, we too are
transformed into the Mystical Body of
Christ. We gather every eighth day, every
Sunday not because God really needs our
work of liturgical prayer but because we
need to do it. Prayer on Sunday shapes
what we say and do and hold as true in the
following week.

Every Sacrament, every Liturgy, every
prayer as Church holds out some central
value, some key truth. These the Church
holds dear.
WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES BY PRAYING

First, the Church knows and believes that prayer, both individual and communal, is absolutely necessary (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 2). The Church knows and believes that devotion must always serve and be in harmony with Liturgy (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 13).

Second, praying in right ways strengthens our belief in God, in Church, and in Sacrament. Just as love that is never expressed dies, prayer that is never made cannot be acted on, goes unheard, brings about no response (see Sing to the Lord, no. 5).

There is an ancient saying: lex orandi, lex credendi (literally, "the law of prayer is the law of belief"). This maxim dates from the fourth century, is credited to Prosper of Aquitaine, a disciple of Saint Augustine, and affirms that Liturgy is the norm of faith. To say this another way: how the Church prays witnesses to what the Church believes.

WHAT THE CHURCH LEARNS BY BELIEVING

Liturgy is indeed the first school of the Church. And as for all schools, we learn by doing and by repetition. We may not always "feel like" praying this day, this time, or this instance. But the good habits of praying as Church always helps us not forget who we are (Church) and whose we are (Christ’s). The good habit of good prayer both strengthens belief and brings it into sharper focus.

IN SUMMARY

Praying and believing are fundamental to the People of God. Let Liturgy manifest belief. And let belief be manifest in Liturgy.

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Eliot Kapitan is the director for the Office for Worship and the Catechumenate in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.
SIGNS OF REVERENCE TO CHRIST AND TO THE EUCHARIST

by Eliot Kapitan

With the gradual reception of the new Roman Missal, great attention has been given to posture and gesture during the Communion Rite of Mass.

The Bishops of the United States have determined the following norms: Communion is received standing; each communicant bows his or her head to the Sacrament before the ritual dialogue and reception under both kinds, both Body and Blood [see General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 160].

All of this raises the questions: When do we bow? When do we genuflect? What do bowing and genuflecting mean?

HOW THE CHURCH PRAYS

The Church’s ritual books are clear about when the faithful genuflect and bow before and during Liturgy. Here are the key times for reverence to Christ and to the Eucharist.

1. Upon entering the church, each person goes to the place where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved and either stays for a visit or at least genuflects [Ceremonial of Bishops, no. 71].

2. Although the practice during exposition and benediction prior to Vatican Council II was to touch both knees to the ground and bow the head when entering or leaving the place of exposition, that is no longer the norm. “Genuflection in the presence of the blessed sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration, is on one knee” [Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass, no. 84].

3. Each person also genuflects when passing before the Blessed Sacrament. The exception is when ministers are walking in procession [Ceremonial of Bishops, no. 71] and in the midst of Liturgy.

4. A genuflection is made to the holy cross from the veneration during the liturgy of Good Friday of the Lord’s Passion until the beginning of the Easter Vigil [Ceremonial of Bishops, no. 69; Roman Missal; and On Preparing and Celebrating the Paschal Feasts, nos. 71 and 74].

5. A deep bow of the body is made to the altar. This is done by all the ministers in procession except those carrying articles used in celebration [Ceremonial of Bishops, no. 70; General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002, no. 122]. The faithful may also do this before taking a place in the church.

6. During the Creed, a deep bow of the body is made while professing the words of incarnation.

7. During the celebration, all who enter the sanctuary, leave it, or pass before the altar, make a deep bow of the body to the altar [Ceremonial of Bishops, no. 72].

8. During Mass, the Priest celebrant alone genuflects twice at the words of institution during the Eucharistic Prayer. The concelebrants and all who are standing make a deep bow of the body [General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002, no. 43].

9. Just before the showing of the host and chalice, the Priest celebrant genuflects and then invites the faithful to Communion [Roman Missal].

Now, neither a deep bow of the body nor a genuflection are made by members of the faithful who come in procession for Communion.

WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES BY PRAYING

Both the genuflection and the deep bow of the body to Christ and to things of Christ are ways to acknowledge his marvelous presence among us.

His passion-death-rising is the means of our salvation. We remember this Paschal Mystery of Christ every time we celebrate Mass and take part in Communion. We honor Christ and the Eucharist every time we genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament or bow the body to the altar of sacrifice and table of Communion.

Although Baptism is the entrance into the sacramental life, Eucharist is at the very heart. Eucharist is the weekly, even daily, celebration of Christ-with-us. There is even a special way to describe it: real presence.

WHAT THE CHURCH LEARNS BY BELIEVING

Practicing these signs of reverence—genuflecting and a deep bowing of the body—help us do them well. Doing these signs of reverence well, help us notice and attend to Christ who is always present. Reverently doing these signs, help us be reverent.

We give honor and worship to Christ, the one from whom we take our name. We give honor and worship to Christ who is the beginning and the end. We give honor and worship to Jesus Christ yesterday and today and for ever. Amen.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

A genuflection (from the Latin, genu, the knee, and flectare, to bend) is to adore Christ. It is reserved for the Blessed Sacrament throughout the whole year and for the holy cross during the Paschal Triduum. It is made from a standing position with only the right knee bending to the ground.

A deep bow of the body shows honor toward a person or toward an object that represents a person. This is the bow made to the altar, “a sign of Christ...a table of joy...a place of communion and peace...a source of unity and friendship...the center of our praise and thanksgiving...” [Dedication of an Altar, IV no. 48]. It may be made in this way. Place your hands on your thighs and let them slide down your legs as you bow at the waist. Once they reach the knees, the bow is deep enough.

Learn by heart Psalm 95. It is the invitatory psalm used at the beginning of each day by those who pray The Liturgy of the Hours. If not the whole psalm, memorize at least verses 6-7.

Come, then, let us bow down and worship,
bending the knee before the Lord, our maker.
For he is our God and we are his people,
the flock he shepherds.

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Eliot Kapitan is the director for the Office for Worship and the Catechumenate in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

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We stand before you, Holy Spirit, conscious of our sinfulness, but aware that we gather in your name.

Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts.

Give us light and strength to know your will, to make it our own, and to live it in our lives.

Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power, for you are God, sharing the glory of Father and Son.

You desire justice for all: enable us to uphold the rights of others; do not allow us to be misled by ignorance or corrupted by fear or favor.

Unite us to yourself in the bond of love and keep us faithful to all that is true.

As we gather in your name, may we temper justice with love, so that all our decisions may be pleasing to you, and earn the reward promised to good and faithful servants.

You live and reign with the Father and the Son, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.