# Catholic Sacraments

# Learning Activities

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# Sacrament Resources Online

Sacrament Activities – Saint Mary’s Press Resource Center

(Hundreds of individual activities, articles, videos, and presentations – available for free)

<https://www.smp.org/resourcecenter/subject/Sacraments/7/>

Sacrament Activities – Loyola Press

<https://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/category/catechetical-issues-topics/liturgy-sacraments/>

<https://www.loyolapress.com/general/faith-formation/>

Sunday Connection (Reflections on the Lectionary Readings) – Loyola Press

<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/sunday-connection/>

Sunday Mass Activities – Catholic Mom

<https://www.catholicmom.com/sunday-mass-activities>

Sunday Readings, Background, and Activities – Our Sunday Visitor

<https://lifelongcatechesis.osv.com>

Jesus Activities – The Religion Teacher

<https://www.thereligionteacher.com/?s=Sacraments>

Liturgical Year – Sadlier Publishing

<https://www.sadlier.com/religion/resources?mixquery=sacraments>

Classroom Activities – Ave Maria Press

<https://resources.avemariapress.com/resources/>

Sacraments 101 and 102 – Busted Halo

<https://bustedhalo.com/category/video/sacraments101>

Sacramental Activities – *Catechist*

<https://www.catechist.com/category/lessons-and-activities/sacraments>

# Sacrament of Baptism

## Jesus’ Experience of Baptism

**Read**.

**The Baptism of Jesus**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?” Jesus said to him in reply, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

(Matthew 3:13-17)

**Meaning of Jesus’ Baptism**

The magnificent story of Jesus’ baptism sums up the Christian life: It is the Gospel in miniature. The story speaks of our sinfulness, of our need for repentance and forgiveness. At the same time the story reveals that our God loves us and is pleased with us as sons and daughters. It shows us that we can face any desert of depression, abandonment or loss because we are loved by a God who will never let us down. The story calls each of us to step up, to carry on the mission of bringing the good news of love and forgiveness to our families, our neighbors – indeed, to anyone sent our way by the Spirit.  
  
Experiencing the love of the Spirit of God is at the heart of Baptism. Baptismal promises commit the followers of Jesus to offer others this same experience of unconditional love and acceptance. …All people come alive when they realize they are loved. (Brennan Hill, *The Baptism of Jesus*. *Millennium Monthly*, October 1997)

**Reflect**

* How do I experience God’s unconditional love in my life?
* How seriously do I take my Baptism in terms of carrying on the mission of bringing the good news of love and forgiveness to others?
* How can I live my Baptism every day?

## A Gospel Story of Repentance and Living Water

**Read** the story of the Samaritan Woman in the John, Chapter 4:4-29, 39-42.

**Reflect**

* Is there some way Jesus is calling me to personal repentance today?
* How is Jesus offering me living water today?
* How will I share the good news of God’s love and forgiveness with others?

Living My Baptism

**Being baptized means. . .**

* being welcomed, and becoming a person who is welcoming
* being healed, and becoming a person who is healing
* seeing others as Christ would see them
* being positive and life-giving in our attitudes and actions
* turning to Christ for guidance through prayer
* turning to the faith community for support in times of need, confusion, and doubt
* staying connected to Jesus and to the faith community by actively participating in the community’s life and ministries, celebrations and sacraments
* being Christ’s light to the world by serving those in need

**For me being baptized means. . .**

Develop a personal plan for living your Baptism daily. Develop specific practices that you can begin now – praying daily, serving those in need, witnessing to faith, becoming a reconciler and healer, etc. Identify the obstacles to implementing your practices, as well as the supports and resources you have for overcoming these obstacles. Then begin!

## Remembering Baptism in Childhood

If you were baptized as an infant take a few minutes to recall your baptism. Use the following process to guide you. If you are a parent or Godparent, share your childhood Baptism story with your child or Godchild.

### What are the Stories?

Arrange to spend some time talking with one or both of your parents about the events and memories of the day you were baptized. Why did they want you baptized? Where were you baptized? Was there a special celebration or party? Who attended the celebration?

### What are the Symbols & Memorabilia?

See if you can locate pictures, gifts or other items that can connect you to the celebration of your Baptism. Who has a copy of your Baptism certificate?

### Remembering My Baptism

* My name was chosen because. . .
* My Godparents are. . .
* They were chosen because. . .
* A significant family memory of my Baptism. . .
* My parents wanted me baptized because. . .

How does their life reflect what it means to be a baptized person?

## Blessing of the Water

The prayer below is used to bless the baptismal water prior to a person’s baptism. Read the prayer thoughtfully and respond to the reflection questions below. Note the references to the stories of creation, the great flood, and the Exodus.

Father,

you give us grace through sacramental signs,

which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power.

In baptism we use your gift of water,

which you have made a rich symbol of the grace

you give us in this sacrament.

At the very dawn of creation

your Spirit breathed on the waters,

making them the wellspring of all holiness.

The waters of the great flood

you made a sign of the waters of baptism

that make an end of sin

and a new beginning of goodness.

Through the waters of the Red Sea

you led Israel out of slavery

to be an image of God’s holy people,

set free from sin by baptism.

In the waters of the Jordan

your Son was baptized by John

and anointed with the Spirit.

Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side

as he hung upon the cross.

After his resurrection he told his disciples:

“Go out and teach all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Father,

look now with love upon your Church

and unseal for it the fountain of baptism.

By the power of the Holy Spirit

give to this water the grace of your Son,

so that in the sacrament of baptism

all those whom you have created in your likeness

may be cleansed from sin

and rise to a new birth of innocence

by water and the Holy Spirit.

We ask you, Father, with your Son

to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of this font.

May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism

rise also with him to newness of life.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

(RCIA,. 222).

Reflect silently for a few moments, then discuss these questions:

* In what ways have seen, or do you believe, that the waters associated with death can give way to the waters that sustain life?
* What difference does your baptism make in your life?

## Celebrate a Baptismal Day

Here is a simple ritual to celebrate the anniversary of one’s baptism. If you cannot recall the exact date, choose a day around the same time of year that the person was baptized. Invite family members and friends to join in the simple celebration.

You will need a bowl with water, and a candle. If you have the person’s baptismal candle, by all means use it.

Gather everyone by saying, “We are here to joyfully remember and celebrate N.’s baptism.”

Light the candle and give to N. to hold. Say something like, “This is the light of Christ. May is shine brightly in your heart always.”

Make the sign of the cross over the bowl of water and say, “With this water we remember our own baptism where we were cleansed of sin and called to be followers of Christ.” Sprinkle each person and ask them to make the sign of the cross.

If anyone was present at N.’s baptism, have them share their memories of the ceremony and the day.

Conclude with prayer. Have each person place a hand on N. One by one, have each person say a simple blessing, such as “N., may your faith be renewed today as we remember your baptism.”

## Renew Your Baptismal Promises

For most of us, our parents and grandparents made promises for us when we were baptized. It is important that we renew those promises and own them for ourselves. Use the ritual below to renew your baptismal promises.

Light a candle in a prominent place for all to see. Say aloud, “May the light of Christ be with us now and always.”

Have one person read one of the statements below, and have the whole group respond with “Amen.” Have the next person read the next statement, also followed by “Amen” from the group. Continue until all the statements have been read. Conclude with all reciting the closing prayer.

We reject sin and seek to live freely as Children of God.

Amen.

We reject the temptations and glamour of evil, and we seek to be mastered only by goodness.

Amen.

We reject Satan, the prince of darkness.

Amen.

We believe in God, creator of all things, and we seek to recognize the goodness in all things.

Amen.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior, who was crucified, died and rose from the dead—all for the sake of our salvation.

Amen.

We believe that the Holy Spirit lingers in the creases and folds of our ordinary lives.

Amen.

We believe in the holy catholic Church, and we recognize our need to form community with other believers.

Amen.

We believe in the communion of saints, and look to them as models for living the Christian life.

Amen.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins, and we are grateful for God’s gracious love that forgives all our failings.

Amen.

We believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. We know that following our earthly life, we can look forward to never ending communion with God in heaven.

Amen.

Let us conclude our prayer:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

## Called By Name

At baptism, we are each given a name carefully considered and chosen by our parents. God has also called us by name. We are created in God’s likeness and we celebrate God’s call through baptism. Through our baptism we our name is revealed to the community and we are celebrated.

### Read

“But now thus says the Lord,  
   he who created you, O Jacob,  
   he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
   I have called you by name, you are mine.”

(Isaiah 43:1)

### Reflection

God calls each and each one of us by name. God has not called only a few special people, but all of us. God did not audition the Israelites to find the brightest, most articulate prophets. Rather, God gave Moses and Jonah and all the others just the gifts they needed to fulfill God’s purpose.

Jesus did not conduct elimination interviews to find the perfect twelve disciples. Rather, he empowered the likes of Peter, James, John, and the others to fulfill God’s purpose. Each of these prophets and disciples had quirks and foibles that, according to earthly standards would have eliminated them from the job pool. Yet in the end, like Jesus himself, they gave their very lives for God’s purpose.

### Activity

On a large piece of paper, write your name. Leave room for others to write.

At home, we are often too aware of each other’s foibles and quirks, and not aware of the gifts that each has to offer. Look around at those gathered. Gazed into their eyes, and whisper each person’s name in your heart.

Pass the name papers around. On each poster write a word or draw a symbol to reflect the gifts you see in that person. Once everyone has written or drawn on each name sheet, share with each other why you put those words and images on each.

## Baptism Acronym

As baptized Catholics we make a promise to live our faith each day. Use each of the letters of the word baptism to help you illustrate or define what it means to live your baptismal promises each day.

B

A

P ray each day for others—family, friends, and those who suffer.

T

I

S

M

# Sacrament of Eucharist

## A Memorable Eucharist

What was one of your most memorable experiences of Eucharist? Describe what made it special or memorable. (Think of a particular Sunday Mass, a Christmas or Easter Mass, or Mass at a special event such as a retreat weekend.)

What makes a Eucharistic celebration meaningful for you? Name several things that make it meaningful you.

## Reflect on the Meaning of Eucharist for You

Referring to the Eucharist, St. Augustine once said: “See who you are… Become what you receive.” What does that saying mean to me?

When we celebrate the Eucharist attentively, we unite ourselves with Christ present in his act of total self-giving. What implications does this have for my daily life?

## The Sacrament of Eucharist: Food, Meal and Sacrifice, and Real Presence

This activity looks at Eucharist in three ways: as food for us, as a meal and a sacrifice, and as the real presence of Jesus Christ. After reading about each theme, take a few minutes to reflect on the meaning of what you have read using the reflection questions and then move on to the next theme.

**Eucharist as Food for Us**

Read one of the Synoptic Gospel accounts of the loaves and fishes: Mark 6:34-44 OR Matthew 14:13-21 OR Luke 9:11-17

Now read the account of the loaves and fishes in the Gospel of John, Chapter 6:1-15.

Reflect on the following questions:

* How was the multiplication of the loaves and fishes an anticipation of the Eucharist?
* How has Jesus satisfied the hungers that you have experienced in your life?
* Jesus gave the loaves and fishes to his disciples to feed the crowd. How has Jesus asked you to feed others?

**Eucharist as Meal and Sacrifice**

Read the account of the Last Supper in the Gospel of Mark (14:22-26) and the Gospel of Luke (22:14-20).

Reflect on the following questions:

* How do you see the Last Supper as both a meal and a sacrifice?
* In what ways have you experienced the Eucharist as a meal?

**Eucharist as the Real Presence of Jesus**

Read about Jesus as the Bread of Life in the Gospel of John 6:31-35, 48-58.

Read these reflections.

Kenan Osborn writes, “‘True, real and substantial’ are very abstract terms when applied to *presence*. In day-to-day life, we do not speak about people whom we love being ‘truly, really and substantially’ present to us. More often than not, we speak about presence in terms of intimacy. Jesus wants to be intimately close to each of us. Jesus is not simply present by being in the same building as we are or by being physically close to us but not caring about us.

“Rather, Jesus, in the Eucharist, wants to be and is deeply present to us in love and in compassion. Only when we begin to understand the Eucharist as a time when Jesus is not distant, but close; not aloof, but very intimate; not above us, but profoundly near us; not judging us, but compassionate toward us, will we be truly able to relate this teaching of the Church to our faith and devotion.”

(*Sacramental Guidelines: A Companion to the New Catechism for Religious Educators*.)

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Jeffrey D. VonLehmen writes, “…we need a body and blood relationship with God in Christ. We can only begin to understand the body and blood of Jesus when we understand true love in relationships involving friends, family and marriage.   
  
“Truly the Eucharist is a real, interpersonal encounter between God and the worshipping community precisely because Christ is body-and-blood present. Our human experiences of love and relationships tell us that any lover seeks concrete union with the beloved. Although there may be new formulas to describe the real presence, the love expressed in the Eucharist is as old as Christmas. It is like the love between a mother and her infant in the womb.

(*Real Presence in the Eucharist.* *Catholic Update*.)

Reflect on the following questions:

* Can you think of a situation when your *real presence* (not just there in spirit) was important for another person – a family member, a friend, a co-worker?
* What does it mean to you when we say that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist?
* The New Testament and the unvarying tradition of the Church tell us clearly that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. Why do you think that many Catholics have difficulty believing this?

Prayer

As bread that was scattered on the hillside

was gathered together and made into one,

so too we, your people,

scattered through the world,

are gathered together around your table and become one.

As grapes grown in the field

are gathered together and pressed into wine

so too we are drawn together

and pressed by our times to share a common lot

and are transformed into your life-blood for all.

So let us prepare to eat and drink as Jesus taught us:

inviting the stranger to our table

and welcoming the poor.

May their absence serve to remind us

of the divisions the Eucharist seeks to heal.

And may their presence help transform us

into the Body of Christ.

(Adapted from the *Didache*, as it appears in *More than Words*, Janet Schaffran and Pat Kozak, Oak Park: IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1986, p. 51)

## Recall a Memorable Meal

Bring to mind a meal that you shared with others that is particularly memorable. Perhaps it was a holiday supper in your home, or maybe it was a meal you remember from you childhood. Perhaps you were eating with family members, or with people you had just met.

* What makes this meal worth remembering? Was it commemorating a special occasion?
* How long ago did this meal take place? Who was there?
* How did the meal change you? Did it also change others?
* How does it make you feel to remember this meal?
* If you could re-live this meal, would you say or do anything different, or would you leave it as is?

## Mealtime Blessings

Use mealtime prayers as a way to teach children to recognize that God is the creator and sustainer of life. Write your own prayers, use a traditional favorite, say a spontaneous, or sing a song. Mealtime prayers provide an opportunity for family members to practice praying publicly. Try rotating the leadership role. Don't hesitate to pray when guests are present, rather welcome them into your family's rituals.

Here are a couple of meal prayers you can put into the “rotation.”

*Loving God, we thank you for allowing us to come together as a family. Please help sustain our lives and love by blessing this food. We ask this through, Jesus our brother. Amen.*

*Loving God, we thank you for nourishing our body and soul through this meal. We are grateful to be part of the larger Christian family. We ask your blessings on our family as we seek to grow closer to You through our love for each other. We ask this through Jesus our brother. Amen.*

## A Food Appreciation Ritual

Relax and take a couple of silent deep breaths.

Now, pick up your piece of bread. Take a good close look at it. Smell it. Close your eyes and imagine how this bread arrived at our table -the wheat growing in the fields, the harvesting, the mixing of ingredients, the baking, the delivery to the store, and our bringing it home. Take a big, slow bite of your bread. Chew it slowly. Savor the flavor and texture. Close your eyes and allow the last bits to be swallowed, and be grateful for such a simple but wonderful flavor. Be grateful, too, for all the people who labored to bring this bread to our table.

Now choose another dish on your plate and take a small portion. Raise it your nose and smell it. Take a bite and savor it as well. Eating is a truly pleasurable experience, a great gift from God. Sometimes, though, we eat so fast the pleasure is lost, or the only way to receive this pleasure to over-eat until our bellies are about to burst.

The slower you eat, the less you will eat. It's true. It takes your stomach about twenty minutes before it sends a signal that you're getting full. A person can plow a lot of food into themselves before twenty minutes go by. But if we eat slowly, we enjoy the food more so, receive the nourishment we need, and keep from overeating.

Take a bite from a third dish in the same manner. This one we'll just do in silence. ...

And now, before we finish our meal, let us join hands and pray,

Dear God, our Provider, we are truly grateful for this meal. We thank you for the pleasure of food. We seek your presence in our eating. Keep us mindful of our daily bread. Help us to slow down enough to appreciate all that it takes to bring nourishment to our table.

God, we are also thankful for the loved ones of our home with whom we share this meal. Let every bite nourish our bond of love. Please bless those who are separated from family, friends and loved ones when they come to the table. Bless especially those who are alone and lonely. Give them the comfort of your gracious presence at their meals. Amen.

## Tell the Story Yourselves

The gospel stories of Jesus and his friends are rich with meaning for us all. Reading the stories reveals much of that meaning, but reading a story and then re-telling it can reveal hidden insight. Try it with the story of the last supper.

Gather those in your home who wish to participate. This activity will take fifteen or twenty minutes.

1. Read aloud the story of the Last Supper, Luke 22:1-22. Close the Bible.
2. Take a few moments of silence. Let the images of the story sink into your mind and heart.
3. Now, re-tell the story in a progressive way. That means, one person begins the story with a couple of sentences, such as,

“The feast of the Passover was coming. The chief priests and scribes were looking for a way to get rid of Jesus. They approached Judas with a bribe . . . “

1. Then another person picks up the thread of the story and carries it a bit further. Go around to each person in the group, each one contributing a couple of sentences to the story. If one person skips over an important piece of the story, don’t correct, just fill that piece in with the next contributor. If someone adds something that isn’t part of the Scriptural story, don’t worry. Today it’s part of the story being told. You may go around to each person several times before the story is told.
2. Take another short period of silence and allow the story-told to sink into your mind and heart.
3. Discuss among yourselves. What did you learn about the story as it was told? What insights came to you as you participated in this activity? What is the message of this story for you today? How will you remember this story the next time you go to Mass and receive Communion?
4. Close in prayer. “Jesus, you gave your life so that we may live. Help to remember your ultimate sacrifice each time we feel hungry or thirsty. Let our physical hunger and thirst turn our hearts toward you, with a willingness to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others. Amen.”

## The Importance of Bread

Bread is and was a sign of God’s taking care of his people. It was a sign of nourishment, freedom from hunger, and satisfaction of the person’s hunger for God. One story about bread that we often hear is the story of God sending manna to the hungry Hebrew people in the desert.

**Read** Exodus 16:19-25.

**Take** a moment to imagine what it was like for the Hebrew people to receive such a gift, imagine what it might have looked like, imagine what it would have meant to them.

**Think** about bread today.

* How central is bread in our diet?
* How many different forms does bread take?
* Name as many kinds of bread as you can. There are as many different forms of bread as there are different cultures and people that make up the body of Christ.

**Pray** together

“O God, we thank you for sending manna to the hungry Hebrews in the desert. And for us, we are forever grateful that you have given us the bread of life through your son, Jesus Christ. Help us to remember you whenever we gather and eat. Amen.”

## We Remember, We Celebrate, We Believe

A table is where we recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread, in the breaking of one another, sharing our lives and journeys together. Follow the process below to prayerfully create your “Eucharistic” table.

**Materials Needed:** Bible, Cross, Two Candles, Bowl of Water, Colorful Cloth, Wine Glass, Loaf of Bread, Family Photo, A Chair

### The Ritual

**Read** Luke 24: 28-32

**Person 1:** We place this cross on the table. It reminds us that our life is rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

**Response**: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**Person 2**: We place this Bible on the table, as we recognize the story of God’s faithfulness to his people and God’s people’s attempts to be faithful to him.

**Response**: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**Person 3**: We place these candles on the table and light them as a reminder of how the Word of God is a light for us in our journey with God and to God.

**Response**: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**Person 4**: We place this bowl of water on the table to remind us of how our baptismal promises are renewed each time we profess the creed and celebrate Eucharist.

**Response**: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**Person 5**: We place this cloth on the table to remember that Christ sacrificed his life for us, as the cloth reminds of his burial shroud.

**Response**: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**Person 6**: We place this wine glass on the table as a symbol of grapes crushed and formed into one life-giving drink.

**Response**: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**Person 7**: We place this bread on the table as a symbol of one body, many parts, broken and shared so that all may have life to the full.

**Response**: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**All:** We place ourselves on the table, that we may be transformed and challenged to be the body of Christ each time we celebrate Eucharist.

**Response:** “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”

**Close** with the prayer that identifies us as believers in Jesus. “Our Father . . .”

## Fill in the Blanks

**Use the words below to fill in the blanks.**

1. Before each meal, we should say a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. On Sundays and Holy Days we go to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. A special day for a young child is when he or she receives First \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. The people who help the priest give out Communion are called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
5. The final meal that Jesus and his friends shared is called the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
6. At Mass, the bread and wine are changed into the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_of Christ.
7. When a person goes up to receive Communion, the Eucharistic Ministers says, “The Body of Christ,” and the person responds by saying \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Answers**:

1. Blessing
2. Mass
3. Communion
4. Eucharistic Ministers
5. Last Supper
6. Body Blood
7. Amen

## Words Related to Eucharist

When we think of Eucharist, a number of other words also come to mind. Can you find these words in the puzzle below?

Bread Wine Last Supper Family

Amen Communion Mass Body of Christ

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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**Answers**

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Sacrament of Reconciliation

## An Experience of Reconciliation

Describe an experience of reconciliation in your life – an experience of giving and receiving forgiveness and peace.

* With whom did you reconcile?
* How did you go about reconciling?
* Did you initiate the reconciliation?
* What were the benefits of reconciliation?

## Experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

What has been your experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Think of your experience when you were growing up – as a child and a teenager – and your experience today.

Is the Sacrament of Reconciliation meaningful for you today? What makes (or could make) the sacrament meaningful for you?

Jesus on Forgiveness

The Sacrament of Reconciliation like all the sacraments is rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus. Explore Jesus’ ministry of healing and forgiveness by reading the following key Gospel passages.

* The Pardon of the Sinful Woman: Luke 7:36-50
* The Woman Caught in Sin: John 8:3-11
* Healing a Crippled Man: Luke 5:17-26
* The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-31
* A King Who Forgives: Matthew 18:21-35
* Jesus Forgives His Executioners: Luke 23:33-34

Reflect on the following questions:

* How would you characterize Jesus’ teaching and practice on reconciliation based on his actions and stories?
* How does Jesus’ teaching and practice of reconciliation compare with the world’s understanding and practice of reconciliation?
* How does Jesus’ approach compare to your own?

The Need for Reconciliation in My Life

Find a quiet place this week to pray and reflect on your need for reconciliation and the relevance of Jesus’ teachings and the Sacrament of Reconciliation for your life.

* What do I need to be forgiven today? Whom do I need to forgive?
* How can I live Jesus’ teachings on reconciliation more fully in my life? What do I need to begin doing now?
* How can my celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation help me grow as a Christian and become a more forgiving, reconciling person?

Examination of Conscience

Examination of conscience is an essential element of the Rite of Reconciliation. Find some time and a quiet place before you celebrate the sacrament to pray and reflect on your need for reconciliation using the questions in the following examination of conscience.

**Focusing Scripture: Matthew 22: 36-40**

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to them, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:36-40)

**Reflection Questions**

* Is my heart set on God, so that I really love God above all things and am faithful to God’s commandments? Are the things of this world like money, prestige, or status truly secondary to my faith in God?
* Am I continuing to grow in my relationship with Jesus Christ? Do I pray regularly and read the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, to learn have to be a more faithful disciple of Jesus? Am I growing in my understanding of my Catholic faith?
* Do I worship God regularly by celebrating the Eucharist with an active and conscious participation? Do I celebrate the healing and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year?
* Have I been loving and faithful in my relationships, especially with my spouse, family members, and significant relationships?
* Do I live my life guided by Catholic values, such as respect for dignity of others, respect for creation and the environment, love, care and compassion, forgiveness, honesty, integrity? Which values have I neglected to live faithfully?
* Do I take seriously the call to serve those in need, to alleviate suffering, to share my gifts, talents, and possessions with others? Do I work for justice for victims of oppression, discrimination, and poverty?
* Do I live my Catholic faith and moral principles in the workplace and in the community? Are my decisions in the workplace guided by Catholic moral principles?
* Am I ready to forgive and work for peace in my relationships and in my world?

**Prayer**

Gracious God, open our eyes to see the evil we have done.

Touch our hearts and convert us to yourself.

Where sin has divided and scattered,

may your love make one again;

where sin has brought weakness,

may your power heal and strengthen;

where sin has brought death,

may your Spirit raise to new life.

Give us a new heart to love you,

so that our lives may reflect the image of your Son.

May the world see the glory of Christ revealed in your Church,

and come to know that he is one whom you have sent,

Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord. Amen.

(*Rite of Penance* © 1973 International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. [ICEL] )

## Lovable and Forgivable

Here’s your challenge. Give serious reflection to the two questions below. You may want to write down your responses in a journal. Then, take the risk to share your responses with who loves you, someone you can trust.

* “When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need” (Luke 15:14). When in your life have you been lost, desperate, living in darkness? How did you recover?
* “But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). When in your life have experienced unconditional love and forgiveness? How did it unfold for you?

If you do not have someone in your life with whom to share these stories, offer them to God in the form of prayer. Give thanks to God for guiding you ought of the darkness. And ask God to give you the courage and opportunity to return the experience of unconditional acceptance to another.

## Excusing vs. Forgiving

How would you describe the difference between excusing and forgiving? Have you ever thought about that question? See if the following makes sense to you.

We excuse the *excusable*. For example, you are pushing your shopping cart through the grocery store, and you turn into an aisle and, quite by accident, someone bumps their cart into yours. While you may experience an instant flash of frustration, you know it was an accident and no real harm was done. You both say, “Excuse me,” or “I’m sorry,” and move along giving it no more thought. An excusable infraction.

We forgive the *inexcusable*. Perhaps you have done something, or failed to do something, that has caused real harm and hurt to another. You may not have meant for it to happen, but the hurt is real none-the-less. The two of you need to reconcile, which involves acknowledging the hurt, expressing sorrow and remorse, doing something to amend the infraction, and offering genuine forgiveness. The act was inexcusable, but not unforgivable.

Problems occur when we just excuse that which needs to be forgiven. Some of us shy away from confronting our hurts. We shrug it off with words like, “It’s okay,” or “No problem,” or “Not a big deal.” Yet the unresolved hurt festers inside of us and compromises the relationship. With *inexcusable* infractions, forgiveness is the only route.

## Actions, Thoughts, Omissions

The following ritual activity can be done in solitude or with a small group. Participants need share with others only what they wish to share. You will need small blank cards (business card size), and pens, markers, or colored pencils.

**Begin** with a moment of silence.

**Say** to the group, in these words or your own, “Sins include actions, thoughts, and omissions—the things we should have done but didn’t. Take a few quiet moments to examine your recent daily life. What is a typical sin for you in each category? Write it down. What causes you to sin in this way?” See the example below.

**Allow** time to identify one’s sins.

**Write** a brief prayer of repentance for each of these sins? See the example below.

**Finally**, look at your three prayers, and pick out a key word or phrase from each prayer. On a small card or piece of paper write these three words or phrases. Add color and symbols to the card if you wish. Carry the card with you as a sign that you carry these words with you in your head and heart. They will remind you of your three prayers and help you avoid those sins. Again, see the example below.

**Act**:

Typical sin:

Brief prayer:

Key word or phrase:

**Thought**:

Typical sin:

Brief prayer:

Key word or phrase:

**Omission**:

Typical sin: *Example. It’s my job to empty the dishwasher each morning before I leave the house. I often fail to do this.*

Brief prayer: *Example. Dear God, help me to remember that my family counts on me to empty the dishwasher. Help me get up five minutes earlier each morning so I have time to do my job.*

Key word or phrase: *Example. “my family counts on me”*

## Personal Examination

Make yourself comfortable in a quiet place. Say a prayer of your own choosing to become aware of God’s gracious presence and unconditional love.

Read through the list of “examination of conscience” questions on this page. Choose four or five questions that “hit home” for you today. Take a moment to meditate on each question and write a brief response. Now, you are ready to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

### Examination of Conscience

Before celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, we are encouraged to prepare by thinking about our lives in relation to the word of God. This is often referred to as an examination of conscience. It can take place in the context of a celebration or be carried out on one’s own at any time. The Rite of Penance, the ritual text that guides the celebration of Reconciliation, includes a series of suggested questions for people to use as a guide. Here is a sampling of the questions:

* Is my heart set on God?
* When I pray, do I really raise my mind and heart to God or is it a matter of words only?
* Do I keep Sundays and feast days holy?
* Are there false gods that I worship by giving them greater attention and deeper trust than I give to God?
* Have I genuine love for my neighbors?
* In my family life, have I contributed to the well-being and happiness of the rest of the family by patience and genuine love?
* Do I share my possessions with the less fortunate?
* Am I concerned for the good and prosperity of the human community in which I live, or do I spend my life caring only for myself?
* If I am in a position of responsibility or authority, do I use this for my own advantage or for the good of others, in a spirit of service?
* Have I tried to grow in the life of the Spirit through prayer, reading the word of God and meditating on it, receiving the sacraments, self-denial?
* Have I imposed my own will on others, without respecting their freedom and rights?
* What use have I made of time, of health and strength, of the gifts God has given me to be used like the talents in Gospel?
* Have I been lazy and too much given to leisure?
* Have I been patient in accepting the sorrows and disappointments of life?
* Have I kept my senses and my whole body pure and chaste as a temple of the Holy Spirit?
* Have I gone against my conscience out of fear or hypocrisy?

(*Rite of Penance*, Appendix III)

## Breakfast on the Beach

**Recall**

Recall a time when you have been forgiven for something you’ve done or failed to do.

**Read**

Read the story of “Breakfast on the Beach” in John 21: 1-17.

**Discuss the story**

* For whom is this a story of forgiveness?
* Why does this person need to be forgiven?
* What role do the others play in the reconciliation process?

**Consider these thoughts**

* This is a story of reconciliation between Peter and Jesus. It’s no coincidence that Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to proclaim “I love you” three times to reconcile his three adamant denials just a few days earlier. Jesus provides a beautiful model reconciliation through this encounter.
* But this is also a family story. Jesus and his friends had been together for three years or so, and shared countless meals around a fire, breaking bread and passing fish. Perhaps this familiar—and familial—action helped them recognize that it was Jesus in their midst.
* The point is clear: reconciliation in our families won’t happen unless we come together, break bread, share meals, and spend time together. Only then can the family deal with the difficult issues they face.
* Does your family spend enough time together? Is it possible to share more meals with each other?

**Pray together**

God, we thank you for the forgiveness that you always offer. You will always take us back. We thank you too for the ways you have shown us how to forgive and reconcile with each other, particularly through your Son, Jesus Christ. Even though we want to avoid hurting each other, sometimes we do just that. Help us to remember how to forgive and reconcile together. Amen.

## Act of Contrition

An act of contrition is our prayer of sorrow for our sins, our promise try to avoid the sin in the future, and our sincere expression of desire to make things right with God and with those we’ve offended. You can make an act of contrition any time, as often as you wish, but always when participating in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Consider the prayer of contrition below. Read it over carefully a couple of times. Now, compose your own prayer of contrition.

**Example**:

*O my God, I am truly sorry for hurting you and for hurting those around me. I chose to do wrong, knowing that it was wrong. I seek to make things right again, and I am willing to do penance. While I no intention of hurting others or you, my selfishness kept me from acting as I should. With your help, I will not commit this sin again. Your son gave his life for me and for all. Today I beg your mercy in the name of Jesus.*

## In Times of Darkness

Some of our most intimate relationships occasionally plunge into deep and troubling darkness. Communication and conflict resolution skills fail. Hopelessness begins to take over and the relationship itself is threatened. To practice forgiveness in these times of darkness, ever relationship needs:

### Time

As much as we would like to see it, there is no instant fix. The adage that “time heals” is not completely true because healing takes more than just time, but it certainly take time to heal.

### Presence

For the sake of the relationship we must choose to remain present to the other even when we would just as soon be anywhere else. We hang in even when it seemingly makes no sense.

### Surrender

We don’t give up, but we give ourselves over to the darkness. We move beyond “What if . . .” and “If only . . .” and embrace the reality of our struggle.

### Faith

If we’ve lost our faith in the other, then we at least keep our faith that God can continue to love unconditionally even when we’ve reached our threshold.

### Support

We seek help and support from others. God’s love is concretely experienced through the love of others.

Will these things save the failing relationship? Can’t say. But it will surely fail without them.

## Forgive

Become a person who truly strives to forgive others. Using each of the letters in the word  
 F O R G I V E, create an acronym to help you illustrate the many ways you can forgive others in your daily life.

F

O

R emember that I am not always perfect either. When someone makes a mistake that causes me trouble or pain, I can forgive that person because I may make the same or similar mistake.

G

I

V

E

Occasionally, we must also seek forgiveness. The first step is saying “I’m sorry.” Try the same exercise with the word S O R R Y.

S

O

R

R

Y ou bet I messed up, but I didn’t want to cause harm to anyone, least of all you. I’ll try not to do it again. I hope you’ll forgive me.

## Scrambled Messages

Can you decipher the scrambled messages below? Hint, they all come from the Bible, and they all pertain to forgiveness.

1. FI YOANNE IKRETSS OUY NO HET GTHRI HKCEE, NUTR HET HOTER LSAO.
2. HEWN SEJUS WSA ERIHT AHITF, EH ADIS OT HET LYTPAICRA, “NOS, ROUY NISS RAE GIRONEFV.
3. RHETFA, I VAHE ENNDIS IAAGNST VEEANH DAN FOBERE OUY.
4. ROF IHST ONS FO NEIM AWS ADED DAN SI VILEA AAIGN; EH SAW STOL DAN SI UNODF.
5. FI OUY GIROVFE HET SSNI FO YAN, EHYT RAE INEVFGRO MHET.

**Answers**:

1. “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Mt 5: 39).

2. “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5).

3. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you” (Luke 15:18).

4. “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” (Luke 15:24).

5. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them” (John 20:23).

# Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

## It Takes Presence

Who cares for you and others in your home when they become ill? Chances are it is the one who has developed the capacity to set aside his or her own agenda and be completely present to the one who suffers. In our North American culture, more often than not, it is the adult female in the home, i.e. Mom. How wonderfully convenient that is for the rest of us. As long as I’m not the one who is sick, I need not bother.

Yet are we not all challenged to care, to immerse ourselves in the daily struggles of those who are ill? Tending the sick is not necessarily a natural charism for that one person in your home. Rather it is a capacity she has acquired, and one you can acquire also.

Look at it this way, the posture and skills needed to tend the sick are much the same as those needed to tend ones spiritual life:

* Presence in the moment
* Seeking insight and understanding
* Relentless commitment in spite of fleeting feelings
* Focus on the other
* Sense of hope
* Deep seeded love

If you wish to deepen your spiritual journey with Christ, why don’t you be the one to tend the ill in your home next time.

## Anticipating Surgery

Psalm 121 can offer comfort and courage to a person facing surgery. Light a candle at home. Read the psalm together. Bring the psalm with you to the hospital and read it in the waiting room.

### Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
   from where will my help come?   
My help comes from the Lord,  
   who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;  
   he who keeps you will not slumber.   
He who keeps Israel  
   will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;  
   the Lord is your shade at your right hand.   
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
   nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
   he will keep your life.   
The Lord will keep  
   your going out and your coming in  
   from this time on and for evermore.

## A World in Need of Healing

Pray this ritual whenever you heart is burden by loved one who needs healing, or when you yourself seek wholeness.

### Opening Prayer

The hurts of the world have reached a magnitude that we cannot bear by ourselves. We turn to you, O God, for relief and comfort. We know you are graciously present to all who suffer, and we know that healing is possible.

### Readings

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. (Mark 1: 32-35)

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up. (James 5: 13-15.)

### Prayer

Let us pray.

O God, in your infinite love, we know you will not abandon us in our suffering.

**Amen.**

O God, through your Holy Spirit, we know that grace and healing are available to us.

**Amen.**

O God, you have taught us to ask for what we need, and so we pray with fervent hearts that you bring healing to a world in need, and in particular to N.

**Amen.**

We conclude by praying with confidence the prayer that identifies us as believers in Jesus.

**Our Father . . .**

## What To Do, Exactly

Okay, you know someone who is seriously ill. Their condition frightens you and you don’t know what to do. You want to help, but you don’t want to say the wrong thing. Take a deep breath. Relax for a moment, and allow the Holy Spirit to inspire you.

Now, here are six concrete actions you can take.

1. **Visit.** Go see the person who is ill. Set aside enough time to be fully present with him or her. Don’t worry about what to say. Your presence means more than your words. Allow yourself to be comfortable with silence.
2. **Pray.** Offer your prayers for and with the ill person. Make a commitment to pray for this person each day. Your own heart will be softened with compassion as God receives your prayers. Pray also for the other friends and loved ones of the ill person. And, if you feel moved to do so, offer to pray with the person who is ill.
3. **Comfort.** Provide whatever physical comfort you can, such as fresh water, a meal, fluff pillows. Don’t just ask, “Can I do anything to make you more comfortable?” Use your intuition and offer concrete suggestions, “Would you like me to rub your feet or comb your hair?” “Are you chilled? Can I put another blanket on you?”
4. **Love.** Express your love for your dear one who is ill. Your very presence shows that love, but don’t hesitate to reinforce your presence with “I love you.” Those words themselves can bring strength and healing.
5. **Nourish.** Beyond physical nourishment, offer to “feed” their mind, heart, and spirit. One way to do so is to read aloud to them from Scripture, or from spiritual reading, or even from a good story. Reading together builds intimacy.
6. **Relieve.** If you do not have a primary caretaking role of the ill person, then offer to give respite to those who do. Can you spend a day or a weekend while the primary caretakers have some time away? Can you offer to cook meals for them? In what ways can you offer relief?

## From a Distance – A Simple Ritual

**Dim** the lights in the room. Light a candle.

**Take** a few moments of silence to recognize God’s gracious presence in your midst.

**Bring** to mind a person you know and love, who suffers from pain, illness, a broken heart, and who is not near you at this time. Perhaps you wish you could be with this person, but it is just not possible.

**Share** with one another a sentence or two about your loved one who is hurting and apart from you.

**Pray**

“Loving God, may my prayer for N. become a healing ointment for her body and soul. Just as the Centurion’s servant was healed, I place my confidence in you that so too will N. be healed. I pledge my prayers for her sake, and each day I will light this candle and come to you on her behalf until she is healed. Amen.

**Offer** each other a gesture of peace.

## Pray, Touch, Anoint

Gather everyone in the room with the sick person.

### Prayer

We remember all those who are sick and ask you to sustain them with your grace.

Response: **Hear us, O God.**

Bless N. with your love and your strength.

Response: **Hear us, O God.**

Help N., although weak in body, to remain strong in Spirit.

Response: **Hear us, O God.**

May our prayer this day bring lasting healing to our loved one, N.

Response: **Hear us, O God.**

Help each one of us to be constant and diligent in our prayers and care for N.

Response: **Hear us, O God.**

### Reading

Read aloud Matthew 9: 27-31

### Laying on of Hands

All family members place a hand on the sick person. In silence, allow your hands to remain on the person for at least a couple of minutes as each person prays for the person’s recovery.

One at a time, have each member mention a particular personal quality about the sick person that is meaningful and endearing. For example, “Your smile in the morning helps me wake up and greet each day anew.” Or “Your perseverance in this time of illness inspires me.”

### Anointing

With oil, rub the person’s hands or feet or head—whichever seems appropriate. Ask each family member to offer a blessing to which the sick person can respond “Amen.” For example, “May God bring healing to your body, your heart, and to your spirit. Amen.” Or, “May your recovery be swift and complete. Amen”

Conclude the ritual with “Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.”

## Matching Game

Match the biblical character described in the left hand column with the correct Gospel healing story from the right hand column.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Servant lying ill. | 1. Person touched Jesus’ clothing and was healed (Luke 8:43-48). |
| 1. Leper seeks healing. | 1. Jesus laid his hands on the person who then stood up straight and was healed (Luke 13: 11-13). |
| 1. Woman in bed with a fever. | 1. Jesus reached out and touched the person, who was then healed (Matthew 8: 14-15). |
| 1. Woman afflicted with hemorrhages. | 1. Jairus’s daughter is restored to life (Luke 8: 49-56). |
| 1. Twelve year old girl dies. | 1. Roman centurion seeks Jesus’ help (Matthew 8: 5-13). |
| 1. Woman crippled for eighteen years. | 1. Jesus smeared mud on the person who was healed (John 9: 1-12). |
| 1. Man born blind. | 1. Peter’s mother-in-law is healed (Matthew 8: 14-15). |

**Answers**

1=E 2=C 3=G 4=A 5=D 6=B 7=F

## What You Can Do

Use each of the letters below to name things your family can do to care for someone who is seriously ill.

A rrange for meals to be delivered to the sick person’s home.

N

O

I

N

T

Sacrament of Marriage

## Image and Likeness

Think of it this way. We believe in God as Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit. We also believe in God as ONE: unified in relationship of love. God as three-in-one reflects perfect relationship, perfect intimacy, perfect love. As humans, we approach the image and likeness of God in our genuine yearning for relationship, intimacy, and love. One of the most common, yet most pronounced, expressions of that yearning is when a man and woman come together in marriage. They commit themselves to model, as best they can, unconditional love for each other, for their children, and for their community. Together they reflect the image and likeness of God.

Bring to mind one or two married couples whom you know and admire.

How do they reflect the image and likeness of God to you?

## Reconciling Well

When two or more people live together for much more than a day, let alone a lifetime, conflict is inevitable. Here are several characteristics common among couples (and family members) who reconcile well.

1. They recognize that conflict will occur now and again. They accept that they no one is perfect, and they commit themselves to reconciling each hurt.
2. They spend their energy seeking solutions rather than laying blame.
3. They distinguish the person from the infraction. The act causing conflict may have been bad, but the person is inherently good.
4. They know the difference between excusing and forgiving. They excuse minor mishaps when nobody is at fault, but they go through the hard work of forgiveness for those thing which are inexcusable.
5. They ritualize and celebrate their healing. They hug, make love, go out to dinner, say a prayer of thanksgiving—any expression to acknowledge that they have been reconciled.

Do you see any of these characteristics in your marriage or family?

## Rings

**Ask** a married person to show you his or her wedding ring. Even you are married, ask to see another’s ring. Don’t ask them to remove it, rather, hold the person’s hand and examine the ring. Appreciate its beauty and its meaning.

**Ask** if there is a special meaning or history behind this ring.

Rings are important to us. For some lovers, as their relationship develops several rings are exchanged. A “promise” ring signifies the couple is seriously pursuing their relationship. An engagement ring announces that they are committed to getting married. And, of course, the wedding rings are blessed and given on the wedding day.

Why a ring? What does a ring tell us about love and faithfulness? Like a ring, God’s love has no beginning and no end. A ring can is also like the circle of life, flowing from one moment into the next, connected as human beings on our path toward living and seeking God’s eternal life.

**Read 1 John 4: 7-21.**

Notice the circular way in which John describes God’s love and our response to that love. It’s like a ring—no beginning, no end. It is one thing to say, “I love you,” but it is much more actually—and actively—love the others in our lives. Read I Corinthians 13 for some ideas.

**Pray Together**

May God bless us with abundant love of family and friends. Amen.

May God bless us with patience and perseverance in loving all whom God places in our lives. Amen.

May God bless us with the love of Jesus and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us remember and to celebrate God’s faithful love, as witnessed by the married persons in our lives, and the rings they wear.

## Anniversary Ritual

To help celebrate a couple’s anniversary, gather the whole family for this brief reflection and ritual.

### Gather

Invite people to sit comfortably. Light a candle to represent the light of Christ that shines through the couple’s love.

### Reflect and Share

Invite each person to share one memory from the past year that depicts of moment of blessing received from this couple. Have spouse share as well.

### Pray

Each spouse, in turn, takes the lighted candle and hands it to the other, saying: “N. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I give you this candle as a sign of the light I will continue to strive to be for you.”

Response from spouse: “I am grateful for the light you are to me.”

All: “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” (Is. 60:1). Amen.

## Staying Connected

For the Christian couple, their entire life together is the Sacrament of Matrimony. Yet, over time people change and relationships evolve. Here are five ideas for staying sacramentally connected over the long life of a marriage.

1. Accept your relationship as journey that the two of you travel embracing the knowns and unknowns together, as opposed to state in life that you accomplished and must now remain.
2. Keep the image of the end in mind. What is your dream for the two of you? How do you picture the two of you as you come down to the end of your lives?
3. Continually replace your fabricated image of your beloved with the real other. Every day you can learn something new about your spouse.
4. When confronting challenges and problems, imagine yourselves working side-by-side, rather face-to-face with the problem in between you two.
5. Refrain from caring for yourself first. Seek to care for your beloved. But be sure to care for yourself.

## Daily Blessings

To keep love alive, we must bless each other with God’s love. Spouses, parents, children, anyone can use some or all of the blessings described here. Feel free to adapt them to your liking.

**Leave-taking in the morning:**

Person #1: “Today is the day the Lord has made.”

Person #2: “I will rejoice and be glad.”

**Meal conversation**. Each person at the table responds to these two questions:

How were you called to be a gift to another person today?

How were you called to receive a gift today?

**On the eve of an important day**.

For the one anticipating an exam, an important interview, a difficult meeting, and so on, trace a cross on his or her forehead and offer this blessing, “Just as you can count on my prayers and support, so much more so you can count on God’s presence and faithfulness for your difficult journey ahead.”

**Do you have a daily ritual of your own? Can you create one?**

## Taken, Blessed, Broken, Given

The journey of the spiritual life requires the language of love an intimacy. The covenant of marriage, the intimacy of lovers, and the connection of soul mates gives us insights into our desires to grow closer to God. You need not be married to appreciate the spiritual language of love. Consider the words of Henri Nouwen from his book *Life of the Beloved*.

### Taken

“In order to live a spiritual life, we have to claim for ourselves that we are ‘taken’ or ‘chosen.’ . . . When I know that I am chosen, I know that I have been seen as a special person. Someone has noticed me in my uniqueness and has expressed a desire to know me, to come closer to me, to love me” (pp.44-45).

### Blessed

“It is not easy to enter into the silence and reach beyond the many boisterous and demanding voices of our world and to discover there the small intimate voice saying: ‘You are my Beloved Child, on you my favor rests.’ Still, if we dare to embrace our solitude and befriend our silence, we will come to know that voice” (pp. 62-63).

### Broken

“Our brokenness reveals something about who we are. . . . The way I am broken tells you something unique about me. The way you are broken tells me something unique about you. . . . Our brokenness is always lived and experienced as highly personal, intimate and unique. . . . Our brokenness is truly ours. Nobody else’s. Our brokenness is as unique as our closeness and our blessedness” (p. 71).

### Given

“I think that our deepest human desire is to give ourselves to each other as a source of physical, emotional and spiritual growth. . . . As the Beloved ones, our greatest fulfillment lies in becoming bread for the world. That is the most intimate expression of our deepest desire to give ourselves to each other” (p. 89).

Think about the most intimate human relationship in your life. If you are married, or in love, think of your beloved. If not, who is the one person to whom you are closest? How would you describe the journey of that relationship in the spiritual language of taken, blessed, broken, and given? Write down your thoughts. Share them with your beloved if you wish.

Think of your relationship with God. How would you describe your spiritual journey in the love language of intimacy? Use the same framework—taken, blessed, broken, given. Write your thoughts. Share them with your beloved if you wish.

## In Times of Darkness

Marriage means giving of oneself completely to the other. Sounds lovely, yes? Even romantic! Yet most couples have encountered periods of darkness and disillusionment in their marriage that makes it nearly impossible to give oneself over to the other. To practice forgiveness in times of darkness, every relationship needs:

### Time

There is no instant fix to serious problems. While the adage “Time heals” is a myth, we have to recognize that healing takes time.

### Presence

Spouses must choose to hang-in with each other, particularly at those moments when you would just as soon be anywhere else.

### Surrender

Couples must move beyond the “what if” and “if only” and acknowledge the dark times. Only then can they move toward the light.

### Faith

If one’s faith in the other is waning, all the more need to remain faithful to God, and call upon God’s faithfulness to both spouses.

### Support

Build networks of support individually and as a couple, and then draw on that support during the dark times.

## Interview a Married Couple

Bring to mind a married couple whom you know. It doesn’t matter how long they’ve been married, and it doesn’t matter if you are related to them or not. Ask if you can interview them about their marriage. If they agree, arrange a time that works for all of you.

When you begin the interview, tell the couple that your purpose is simple: you want to learn more about marriage. Tell the couple they can decline to answer any of your questions for any reason. Tell them that what they share in this interview will remain confidential—forever.

Here is a list of questions. There won’t be time to ask them all, so choose the ones that seem appropriate, or make up your own. Allow the conversation to go where it will.

1. How long have you been married? How long did you know each other before that? How long were you engaged?
2. What were the main similarities and differences in your backgrounds?
3. Did you feel well-prepared for marriage? What issues did you discuss before marriage?
4. How was marriage different than you thought it would be?
5. When you were married, did you believe it would be forever?
6. What are the main benefits of being married? What have you seen as the disadvantages?
7. How have you worked out sharing the responsibilities and roles within marriage?
8. How do you keep communication open between you? How do you handle conflict and disagreements?
9. How does religion and spirituality enter into your marriage and family life? Has the church been a help or a hindrance in your marriage? What do you desire or expect from church leaders?
10. Do you have children? How many? What ages? How long were you married before you had a child? How have your children affected your marriage?
11. What is the greatest source of stress in your marriage and family life today?
12. What advice would you give to couples contemplating marriage today?
13. What advice would you give to couples contemplating divorce?
14. If you were getting married now, what would you do differently?

## Marriage Cryptoquip

Each number has a letter assigned to it. Fill the letters in on the blank lines below their corresponding numbers to read a message about marriage.

1=E 2=S 3=O 4=D 5=V 6=N 7=I

8=R 9=P 10=V 11=A 12=T 13=K 14=L

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_;

14 3 10 1 7 2 9 11 12 7 1 6 12

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_;

14 3 10 1 7 2 13 7 6 4

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_.

14 3 10 1 6 1 5 1 8 1 6 4 2

**Answer**

Love is patient; love is kind; Love never ends (I Cor. 13).

## Marriage Crossword

1. Marriage is one of the seven \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. To stay close to God and to each other, married couples can \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ together.
3. At the wedding the Bride and Groom exchange \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Another name for marriage is the Sacrament of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
5. The most important ingredient for a happy marriage is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
6. Marriage lasts for a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

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|  |  |  |  | C |  |  |  |  |  |  | R |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | R |  |  |  |  | 3.V |  | A |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | 4.M | A | T | R | I | M | O | N | Y |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | M |  |  |  |  | W |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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# Sacrament of Holy Orders

## The Rite of Ordination

Many of us have never witnessed the sacramental celebration of ordination. If ever you have the opportunity to attend the ordination of a deacon, priest, or bishop don’t pass it up! When you go, you will notice the following ritual actions as unique to the ceremony. Following are the Steps of Ordination (after the Liturgy of the Word and preceding the Liturgy of the Eucharist):

1. Calling of the Candidates
2. Presentation of the Candidates (after inquiry among the people of Christ and upon recommendation by those concerned with the training of the candidates)
3. Election by the Bishop and Consent of the People
4. Homily
5. Examination of the Candidate
6. Promise of Obedience (to the bishop and his successors)
7. Invitation to Prayer (Litany of Saints while candidates lie prostrate)
8. Laying on of Hands
9. Prayer of Consecration
10. Investiture with Stole and Chasuble
11. Anointing of Hands
12. Presentation of the Gifts
13. Kiss of Peace

## Set Apart for Love

One of the definitions for the word holy is “to be set apart” or “separated.” On this page we read that those summoned to proclaim God’s Word were set apart and consecrated for their mission. They are made holy so that the purpose of their lives corresponds with God’s purpose in the world.

A traditional understanding of holiness is that the person or object is set aside from common usage and dedicated to the service of God. Yet this understanding can lead to the mistaken notion that holy persons and objects must also be other worldly—completely removed from day-in and day-out functions of earthly life. Not so.

Think of it this way, holiness means set apart in two ways:

* Set apart *from sin*—not bound by the possessive and selfish atmosphere in which sinful breeds, particularly in the dominant popular culture of North America.
* Set apart *for love*—free to love others without preoccupation or distraction.

Of course, it’s not just the ordained deacon, priest, or bishop who is called to holiness. Through our baptism, we have all been set apart from sin and for love.

## Who Me? Make Disciples?

It seems quite logical that we expect a deacon, priest, or bishop to evangelize and catechize others—bringing them into the community of believers. Indeed, that is part of their vocation. The bishop is designated the chief catechist for his entire diocese. But of course, he cannot catechize every child, teen, and adult all by himself. He needs help, as done each priest and deacon.

We are all called to make disciples of each other, and the family and home play key roles. The home is called to be a school of discipleship, yet it does not and should not mimic the parish. Rather, the home is a school for the most basic of human activity—rising, bathing, eating, cleaning up, relaxing, dying, grieving, embracing, eating, cleaning up—and how the values of the Kingdom of God are inculcated in these, the most mundane activities.

To put it another way, in a thought attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, we are challenged to preach the gospel at all times, 24/7/365 . . . and if need be, use words.

How does your daily life share faith with others?

## Do You Know Your Baptismal Day?

What is the anniversary date of your baptism? What do you do to celebrate this important anniversary? After all, it’s the date on which you were claimed for Christ! At the very least you can do one or all of the following:

1. Light your baptismal candle or any candle to signify the light of Christ alive in your heart.
2. Take a bowl of water. Make the sign of the cross over it to bless it. Then sprinkle the water on yourself and all the others with you, while making the sign of the cross. You have been cleansed from sin by the waters of baptism.
3. Ask someone who was present at your baptism—parent, guardian, godparent—to share their recollections of that day with you.

If you don’t know your baptism day, try to find out by asking a parent, guardian, or godparent the name of the parish in which you were baptized. Then contact that parish and ask them to send you a copy of your baptismal certificate. The parish is obligated to keep the record. You may be asked for a small fee.

## Prayer of Consecration

The candidate for priesthood kneels before the bishop. With his hands extended over the candidate, the bishop sings the prayer of consecration.

. . . Almighty Father,

grant to this servant of yours

the dignity of the priesthood.

Renew within him the Spirit of holiness.

As a co-worker with the order of bishops

may he be faithful to the ministry

that he receives from you, Lord God,

and be to others a model of right conduct.

May he be faithful in working with the order of bishops,

so that the words of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth,

and the family of nations,

made one in Christ,

may become God’s one, holy people.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, you Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever.

Amen (Ordination of a Priest n. 22).

Here is a suggestion. Offer prayer above for your parish priest each Sunday morning before you leave the house for Mass. In your own way, you will consecrate and bless him to fulfill his vocation.

## World Day of Prayer for Vocations

The fourth Sunday of Easter each year is designated as the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. On this day, all Catholics are asked to join the Holy Father in prayer for vocations to the priesthood, the consecrated life, and to missionary service. We are called to pray for those who already follow Christ in priesthood and religious life, as well as for those discerning such a call.

In 2004, Pope John Paul II said the following in his final World Day of Prayer for Vocations message:

“Yes! The vocation to serve Christ alone in his Church is an inestimable gift of the divine goodness, a gift to implore with insistence and trusting humility. The Christian must be always more open to this gift, careful not to waste ‘the time of grace’ and ‘the time of visitation’ (cf. Lk 19: 44). . .

May all Christian communities become *"authentic schools of prayer"*, where one prays that laborers may not be lacking in the vast field of apostolic work.”

Pray together the following prayer which concludes John Paul II’s message.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *“We turn to you, Lord, in trust!*  *Son of God,*  sent by the Father to the  men and women of every time and of  every part of the earth!  We call upon you through Mary,  your Mother and ours:  may the Church not  lack in vocations,  especially those dedicated in a  special way to your Kingdom.  *Jesus, only Savior of mankind!*  We pray to you for our  brothers and sisters who have  answered "yes" to your  call to the priesthood,  to the consecrated life and  to the missions. | May their lives be renewed day by  day, to become a living Gospel.  *Merciful and holy Lord,* continue to send new laborers  into the harvest of your Kingdom!  Assist those whom you call  to follow you in our day;  contemplating your face,  may they respond with joy  to the wondrous mission  that you entrust to them  for the good of your People  and of all men and women.  You who are God and live and reign  with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  for ever and ever. Amen.” |

## Discerning Vocation

Have you ever wondered if you might be called to Holy Orders or religious life? If you daily prayer and reflection are leading you in this direction, you should take some or all of the following steps:

* Talk with those who know and love you the best. Ask them if they also sense that God is calling you to such a vocation. Sometimes those who live close to us can see the movement of the Spirit in our lives better than we can. Sometimes not.
* Talk with a priest, sister, or deacon whom you know and trust. Ask him or her to tell you about their own vocational journey. Share your own story.
* Continue praying for guidance and direction.
* Visit your diocesan Vocations Office and discuss your situation with the diocesan Vocations director. He or she can describe the opportunities available to you to further your discernment, and the steps involved in formation for a deacon, priest, or sister.
* Participate is a vocations discernment weekend or program. Many dioceses offer retreat experiences for just this purpose.
* Go online. Use your favorite search engine and put in the words “ Catholic vocation.” You will find a host of helpful information about religious life, frequently asked questions, even vocation discernment tools.
* Continue praying for guidance and direction.

Obviously, the call to Holy Orders or religious life is not for everyone. However, all baptized Catholics have a vocation! Whether you are a child, teen, or an adult; whether you are single or married, whether you are rich or poor, God has a vocation for you. Vocation means cooperating with God’s work in the world, finding a purpose for being that is related to God’s purpose. Vocation is a call to partnership with God on behalf of our neighbor. Sometimes our neighbor sleeps in the next room or even on the other side of the bed.

How might you discern your vocation? Consider these steps:

* Talk with those who know and love you the best. Ask them how they see your life cooperating with God’s purpose in the world. Sometimes those who live close to us can see the movement of the Spirit in our lives better than we can. Sometimes not.
* Make a list of the people who you admire. What do they do? How do they partner with God? Can you imagine modeling your life after theirs?
* Talk with a few of these people whom you admire. Ask them to share the story of your life journey with you. Share your own story as well.
* Continue praying for guidance and direction.

Every so often in our lives, we reach a point where it’s natural for us to say, “What’s next?” At these points of change and transition in your life, remember to prayerfully ask the question this way, “How can I find a purpose for being that is related to God’s purpose in the world?”

## Hands and Heart and Head

Even though we are not an ordained deacon, priest, or bishop, we too are called to be the hands, heart, and head of Christ. We too are called to be his disciples. As a family or faith sharing group, enter into the following reflection and ritual.

### Hands

For the deacon, his most defining element is his service. The call to serve is the basis of his Christian identity. He is the *hands* of the apostle.

While you may not be ordained deacon, is there a part of your Christian identity that is called to be of service to others? How so? Reflect. Jot a note or two.

Share your reflections with one another, and then pray, “Lord Jesus, you have called us to be your disciples. Let our hands be your hands in service to others.

### Heart

For the priest, his call is to be the Good Shepherd of his flock. The call to loving care is the basis of his Christian identity. He is the *heart* of the apostle.

While you may not be ordained priest, is there a part of your Christian identity that is called to love and care for others? How so? Reflect. Jot a note or two.

Share your reflections with one another, and then pray, “Lord Jesus, you have called us to be your disciples. Let our hearts be your heart in loving care for others.

### Head

For the bishop, his charism is leadership. The call to humbly guide the believing community on their journey toward the Kingdom of God is the basis of his Christian identity. He is the *head* of the apostle.

While you may not be ordained bishop, is there a part of your Christian identity that is called to lead others on their journey toward the Kingdom? How so? Reflect. Jot a note or two.

Share your reflections with one another, and then pray, “Lord Jesus, you have called us to be your disciples. Let our minds be your mind in leading others to your Kingdom. Amen.

## Who and What

How has the “who” and “what” of your life changed as a result of your baptism and confirmation? Perhaps you received those sacraments so many years ago you can no longer recall what difference they made. If that is the case, try reflecting on these questions:

* At the core of who I am, does it make any difference that I am a baptized Catholic? How so?
* At the base of all that do, does it make any difference that I am a practicing Catholic? How so?

**Reflect**

Journal if you wish. Now, take a risk and share your responses with someone who knows you well.

## Role Match

Match the role in the left column with the description in the right column

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Abbot | A person whose primary vocation is service to the community. |
| 1. Bishop | A woman who joins a religious community to serve God through good works and prayer. |
| 1. Sister | A man who presides at Mass and serves as a key leader in my parish. |
| 1. Pope | Spiritual leader of all the Catholics in my diocese. |
| 1. Deacon | Leader of the entire Roman Catholic Church. |
| 1. Priest | Leader of a religious order of men. |

**Answers**

1=f 2=d 3=b 4=e 5=a 6=c

## Decode the Message

Each number has a letter assigned to it. Fill the letters in on the blank lines below their corresponding numbers to read a message from the Bible.

1=C 2=I 3=S 4=P 5=D 6=L 7=E 8=O 9=K 10=G

11=F 12=A 13=N 14=M 15=T 16=R 17=H

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_

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14 12 9 7 5 2 3 1 2 4 6 7 3 8 11

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_

12 6 6 13 12 15 2 8 13 3

**Answer**

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28: 19).