



21 THE CATHOLIC TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

When a couple marry in a Catholic Church their union is blessed and sealed by God. God establishes their 'marriage bond' in such a way that the relationship between two baptised Catholics is permanent. The married love ('conjugal love') that grows between them involves a total commitment in which bodies, feelings, minds and spirits are united. For the marriage to be successful three characteristics must be present:

1. Indissolubility

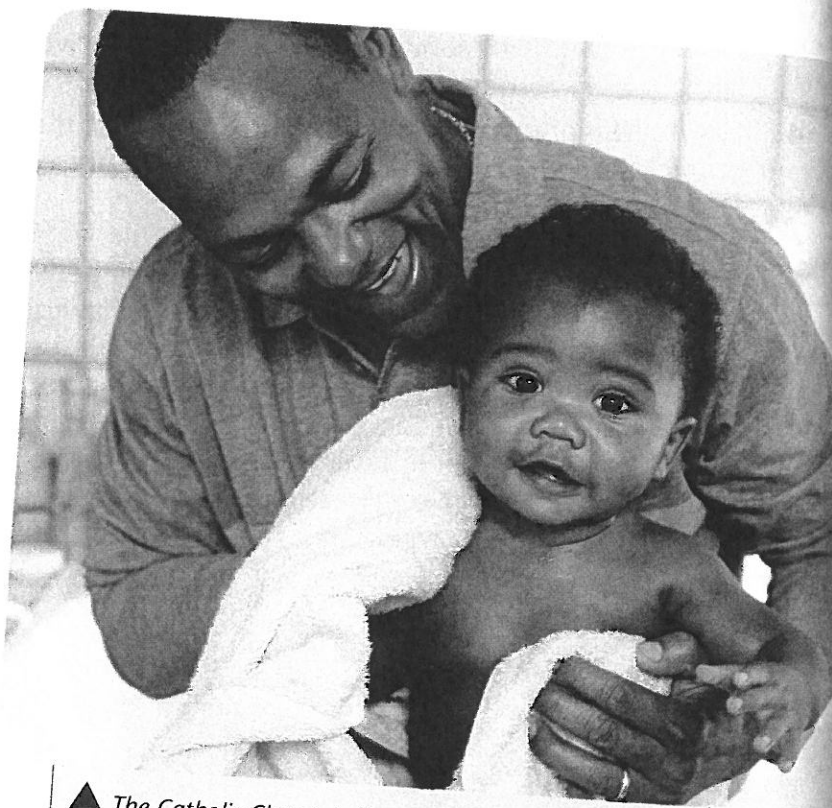
The Catholic Church, following the teaching of the New Testament and 2 000 years of its own tradition, believes that a marriage can never be dissolved. The couple share a relationship that is designed by God to grow throughout their lives together. The Church, through its common faith and its celebration of the Eucharist, provides the necessary means for this to happen.

This unity of purpose between husband and wife can only grow in a marriage where both are truly equal. This is why **monogamy** is the only kind of relationship that the Church can support.

2. Faithfulness (fidelity)

By its very nature, conjugal love requires that a couple must be absolutely faithful to each other. This is a direct consequence of the vows that they make to each other when they marry. You will find out more about this in unit 22. The happiness of the couple and the welfare of their children depend on this faithfulness.

This requirement is not surprising. The closest parallel to the relationship between Christ and his Church is that between a husband and wife. Just as Christ expects total faithfulness from each member of the Church, so both husband and wife should be able to expect it from each other. If a couple find this very difficult they must rely on God's love to help them.



▲ The Catholic Church believes that a marriage should always be open to the possibility of new life.

All of the other Christian Churches would agree with the teaching of the Catholic Church so far, although they have all now come to terms with divorce. They agree that almost all couples set out thinking, and believing, that their marriage will last. Sadly, though, this does not happen in many cases and the Church has a part to play helping those who are battered and bruised by the experience.

3. An openness to fertility

This can be a problem in a 'mixed marriage', when a Catholic marries someone from another Christian tradition. As we saw in unit 16, the Catholic Church is totally opposed to all artificial methods of contraception while the other Christian Churches do not share this belief. By always keeping their marriage open to the possibility of new life, Catholics believe that a couple are sharing in God's work of creation.

Children are God's supreme gift to a marriage. They bring much happiness to a husband and wife. This happiness increases considerably if a couple sees their children grow up to be believing Catholics. Even if only one partner in a marriage is a Catholic, the Church teaches that all children should be brought up in the faith.

There are, of course, many couples who are not blessed with children because either the man or the woman is infertile. You can see how the Catechism deals with this problem in extract A:

A “...[they can] have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of sacrifice.”
(CCC 1654)

1. What do Catholics believe to be the purpose of marriage?
2. “A Catholic wedding service gives the best possible start to a couple setting out on their married lives together.” Do you agree with this comment? Give your reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view.

* DISCUSSION POINT

Do you think it better if one Catholic marries another?



22 THE CATHOLIC MARRIAGE CEREMONY

A *“The love of man and woman is made holy in the sacrament of marriage, and becomes the mirror of your everlasting love.”*
(The Preface of the Wedding Mass)

The quotation in extract A summarises what marriage is for Catholics and what the sacrament of marriage is for. Marriage is a solemn contract between a man and a woman who love each other. The contract is made holy in the sacrament. The ceremony of marriage is basically very simple and will, ideally, take place with a celebration of the Mass.

The Catholic marriage service

The priest welcomes the bride and the groom before the ceremony begins. This is to show the couple that the whole congregation shares in their joy on this happy occasion. After the Mass begins, the priest invites the whole congregation to join in the celebrations.

There is a homily at a **Wedding Mass**. The priest talks to the couple about the meaning of Christian marriage. He explains how a married couple can grow closer to God through their shared love for each other. He also talks about the responsibilities of marriage. The priest then directs three questions at the couple to make sure that they understand what they are doing:

“Have you come to give yourself to each other, freely and without reservation? Will you love and honour each other for life? Will you accept children lovingly from God?”

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that if a couple deliberately set out to make their marriage childless, then it is not valid in the sight of God.

The vows and the ring

As the couple make their vows to each other, the service becomes a sacrament. Each says in turn:

B *“I [name] do take thee [name] to be my lawful wedded wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.”*

The rings are blessed and the bridegroom places one on the woman's finger, offering it as a sign of his love and faithfulness to her in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The couple have promised to give themselves to each other faithfully and exclusively. The ring is now a token of that promise.

The marriage (nuptial) blessing

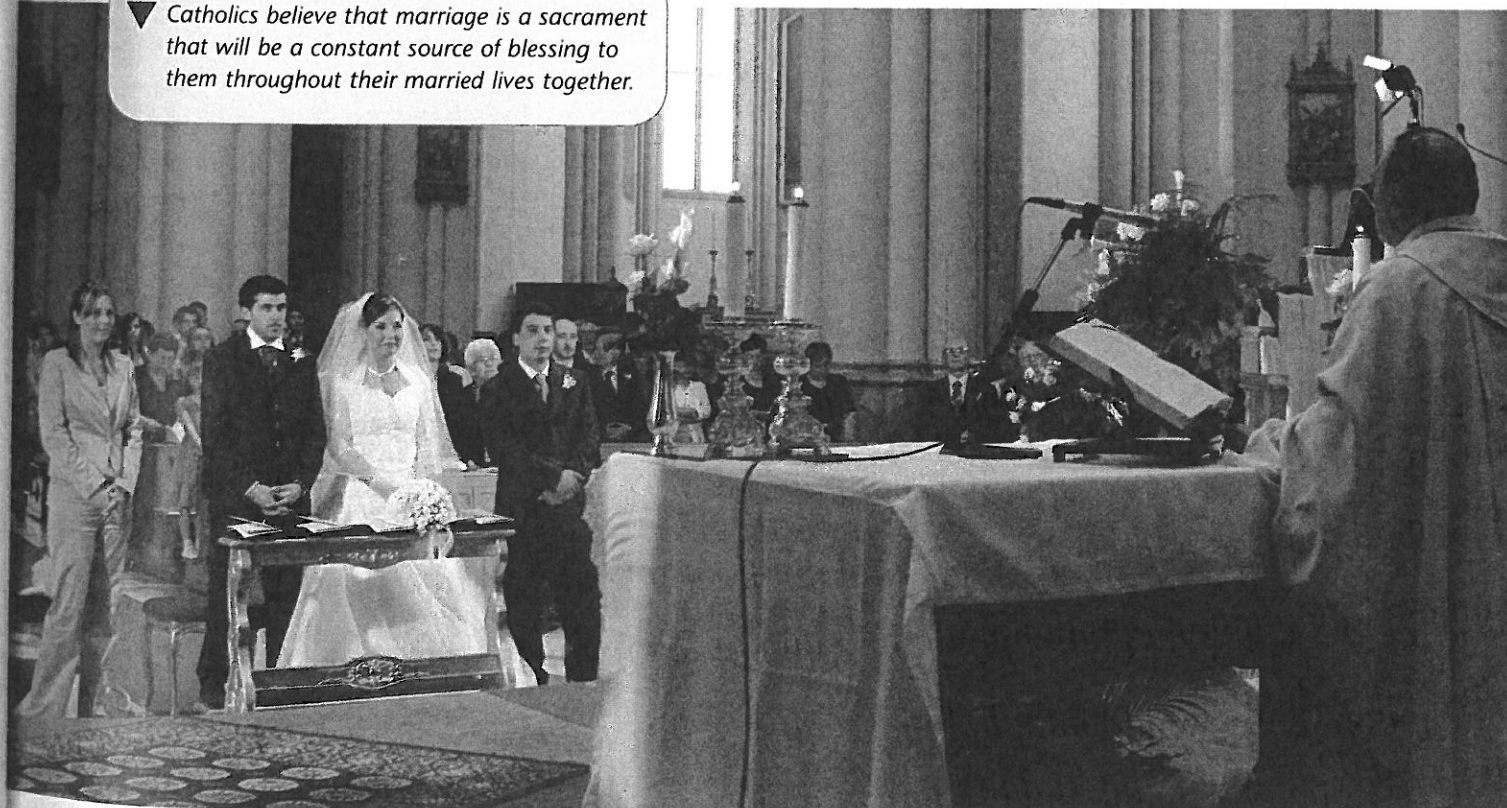
The ideas in the blessing bring out two important themes in Catholic marriage:

1. A husband's human love for his wife is a model of the love that Christ has for his people – the Church.
2. Marriage is a relationship based on a faithfulness that is there for all to see. It is a civil requirement that the Marriage Register has to be signed by the couple and a witness. A marriage certificate is given. The priest may be the authorised registrar. If not, a registrar has to be present.

1. Describe the role performed by a priest at the wedding ceremony.
2. Why are the rings important in the wedding ceremony and what do they symbolise?
3. What are the wedding vows?
4. In his homily, a priest explains the nature and the responsibilities of a Christian marriage. Suggest two points that you think a priest might make in his homily.

TASKS

▼ Catholics believe that marriage is a sacrament that will be a constant source of blessing to them throughout their married lives together.





23 CHRISTIANS AND DIVORCE

There is a sharp disagreement between the Catholic Church and the other Christian Churches over divorce. While the Catholic Church does not allow divorce, it is reluctantly accepted by the other Christian Churches. Among these Churches, however, there are disagreements over the remarriage of divorced people in church.

The Catholic Church and divorce

According to the Catechism there are two 'offences' against the dignity of marriage:

- 1. Adultery.** Adultery is a serious sin against God and is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments:
 - The prophets in the Old Testament put adultery on the same level as idolatry – and there was no greater sin than that.
 - Christ went even further and condemned not only adultery but also lustful thoughts as 'adultery of the heart'.
- 2. Divorce.** The Roman Catholic Church does not recognise divorce because:
 - Christ taught that God's original intention was that the marriage contract should be unbreakable. Extract A shows the clear attitude of the Catechism to divorce.

A *“...the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptised persons can never be dissolved.”*
(CCC 1640)

- Divorce is a grave offence against natural law. It breaks a totally binding contract entered into by two people 'in the sight of God'.
- Divorce is immoral because it harms the spouse who is deserted by his or her partner; children suffer greatly from the separation of their parents and society suffers because divorce spreads like a plague encouraging others to take the same route.

Although the Catholic Church does not grant divorces it does, in exceptional circumstances, grant an annulment. The effect of this is to say that the marriage never officially existed. This can be granted if it can be shown that:

- One of the partners did not agree to the marriage in the first place.
- One spouse did not understand the full implications of marrying.
- The marriage was never consummated – sexual intercourse did not take place.
- One partner did not intend to keep the marriage vows or was not baptised at the time.
- One partner withheld important information at the time of marriage.

Other Christian Churches and divorce

Most non-Catholic Churches allow divorced people to remarry in church although this is up to the local priest or **minister**. If they have a strong moral objection to divorce they can refuse to remarry someone in their church. The couple, however, are then free to find someone who will marry them. Many Churches offer a church blessing to a couple where one has been divorced after they marry in a civil wedding.

Many non-Catholic Christians do object to divorce. They cannot see how the life-long vows of faithfulness to someone else can be made more than once in a person's lifetime. Others, though, are prepared to support someone who has been divorced and now wishes to remarry on two main grounds:

- 1.** They believe in a God who forgives. They know the great trauma that the break-up of a marriage brings and will support anyone who is trying to find happiness.
- 2.** The teaching of the New Testament is not as clear on divorce as some people claim. Although on one occasion Jesus appeared to rule out divorce entirely, on another he appeared to allow it if fornication (adultery) had taken place (Matthew 19.9).

◀ The Christian Church deplores the number of failing marriages that we have in the 21st century.

- 1.** What is the clear attitude of the Catholic Church to divorce – and why?
- 2.** Why do some Christians believe that while divorce is always regrettable it has to be accepted?
- 3.** “The Catholic Church teaches that divorce is always wrong and unacceptable.” Do you agree with this comment? Give some reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view,

* DISCUSSION POINT

The Catholic Church takes a very strong line against divorce. Do you agree with it?



63 WHAT ARE THE SACRAMENTS?

What is a sacrament?

1. Christians believe that God is the supreme mystery. This does not stop them, however, from trying to find words and symbols to express something of this divine mystery. They look for signs and symbols that they can use to remind themselves of the God who is beyond human understanding. These signs or symbols are called sacraments. The word 'sacrament' means 'a signpost which points a way to God'.
2. A sacrament is also a God-given service that brings God closer to the worshipper. It uses material elements – such as bread, water, oil and wine – to bring God closer to the worshipper. The sacraments can do this because the world itself is holy and so God can work through earthly elements to bestow a spiritual blessing on human beings. To enjoy God's grace is to share in the divine life through which human beings can know and love God – calling Him their Father.

The seven sacraments

There are seven special ways, or sacraments, in which Catholics celebrate the good news that Jesus brought God closer to them through his death and resurrection. The Orthodox Church also recognises seven sacraments although it calls them 'mysteries'. The Anglican Church only recognises two of them as sacraments – baptism and the Eucharist. Most Nonconformist Churches also celebrate baptism and the Eucharist, although the **Quakers** and the **Salvation Army**, alone among the major Christian Churches, do not celebrate any of the sacraments.



Christ and the Church as sacraments

1. **Christ and the sacraments.** The sacraments are services by which Christians can receive God's grace. Through celebrating them, they are able to receive God's power into their daily lives. Some of the sacraments, such as baptism and confirmation, are only received once in a person's lifetime. Others, such as the

Eucharist, can be received many times – even daily. Through celebrating the Eucharist, Christians discover that Jesus was the supreme sacrament because he made God known to the people.

2. **The Church and the sacraments.** The power of God is also experienced in the Church. When Jesus left the earth, he established his Church as the living sacrament that continues to make God known in the world. The Church does this through its life and witness. Just as the sacraments make God known to those who believe, so the Church makes God known in the world (extract A).

A *“Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law... The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith... The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify [make holy] men, to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it.”*
(CCC 1210; 1123)



► Anointing the sick with oil is one of the seven sacraments celebrated by the Catholic Church.

Read the extract from the Catechism in extract A.

- a. Explain the three purposes of the sacraments.
- b. Apart from strengthening the faith of believers, the sacraments also serve another purpose. What is it?
- c. Why do you think that the sacraments are called 'sacraments of faith'?

TASK

* DISCUSSION POINT

The Orthodox Church prefers to use the term 'mysteries' to describe the sacraments. Why do you think this is?



64 INFANT BAPTISM

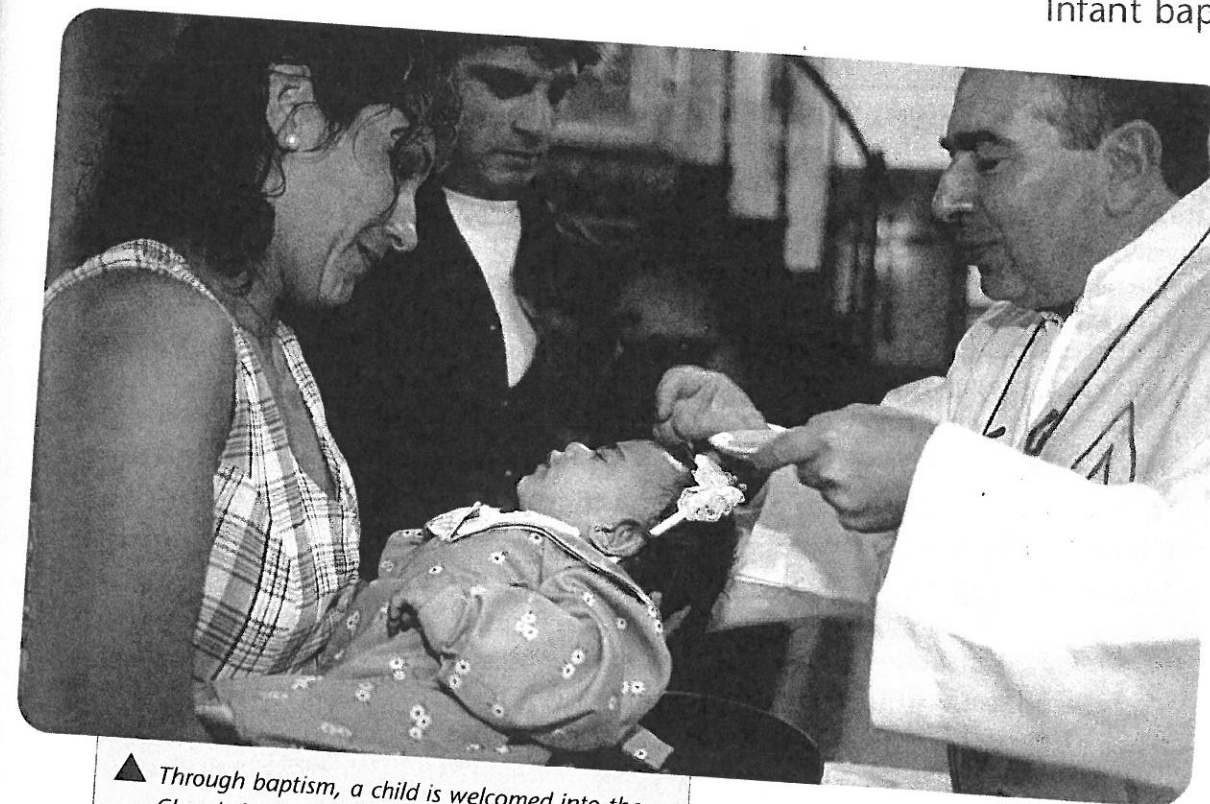
Baptism in the early Christian Church was for adults, but soon there was a demand for a form of baptism that included children as well. Christians wanted their children to grow up as part of the Christian family. From the 4th century onwards, Infant baptism began to replace adult baptism as the norm.

The Catholic service of Infant baptism

In the Church today, Infant baptism is the most widespread 'initiation' ceremony as the Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and other Protestant Churches practise it. In the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, an older convert to Christianity, or someone who was not baptised as a child, can be baptised later in life.

When the Catholic priest greets the parents and the child at the door of the church, he is welcoming them into the family of faith. The service that follows usually takes the form of a Mass.

1. The priest begins by asking for the child's name. To call a child by his or her name underlines his or her uniqueness in the sight of God, who knows us all by name.
2. The parents and godparents – who must be Catholics – are asked questions, called vows, about their own religious faith. By bringing the child to be baptised, they are showing their willingness to bring the child up in the Christian faith. The priest welcomes the child into the Christian family and makes the 'sign of the cross' on his or her forehead.
3. The Liturgy of the Word includes readings from the Old Testament and New Testament. It also includes the Prayers of the Faithful and the Litany of the Saints.
4. Satan is exorcised from the child in a symbolic act. This takes place before the child is anointed with the Oil of Catechumens, symbolising the healing and strength of God. The priest lays his hands on the child's head, calling on the blessing of God.
5. After the water in the **font** has been blessed and the parents and godparents have made their final confession of faith, the priest baptises the child by pouring water over his or her head:
“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
 In baptism, Catholics recognise that:
“God is our Father (Abba), Jesus is our brother, the Holy Spirit lives within us.”
6. Finally, the child is anointed with **chrism** (consecrated oil); the parents are presented with a candle which is lit from the **paschal candle** (a symbol of the suffering and death of Jesus) and a white shawl (representing new life) is placed around the child.



▲ Through baptism, a child is welcomed into the Church family and given every opportunity to grow up as a Church member.

The meaning of Infant baptism

Infant baptism is a very important doctrine in the Catholic Church.

1. It cleanses the child from original sin. This is the belief that everyone is born with a sinful nature and even the youngest of children can go against the will of God. The cleansing of baptism and the entry of the Holy Spirit into a child's life show that sin will be resisted as the child grows up.
2. It welcomes the child into the Christian family – the Church. This is why most babies and children are baptised during the Mass because that is when the Church family is most likely to be together.
3. Baptism marks the time when a child is 'born again' and begins the Christian life. Catholics believe that it is very important that a baby is baptised as soon as possible after birth – especially if he or she is weak or unwell.

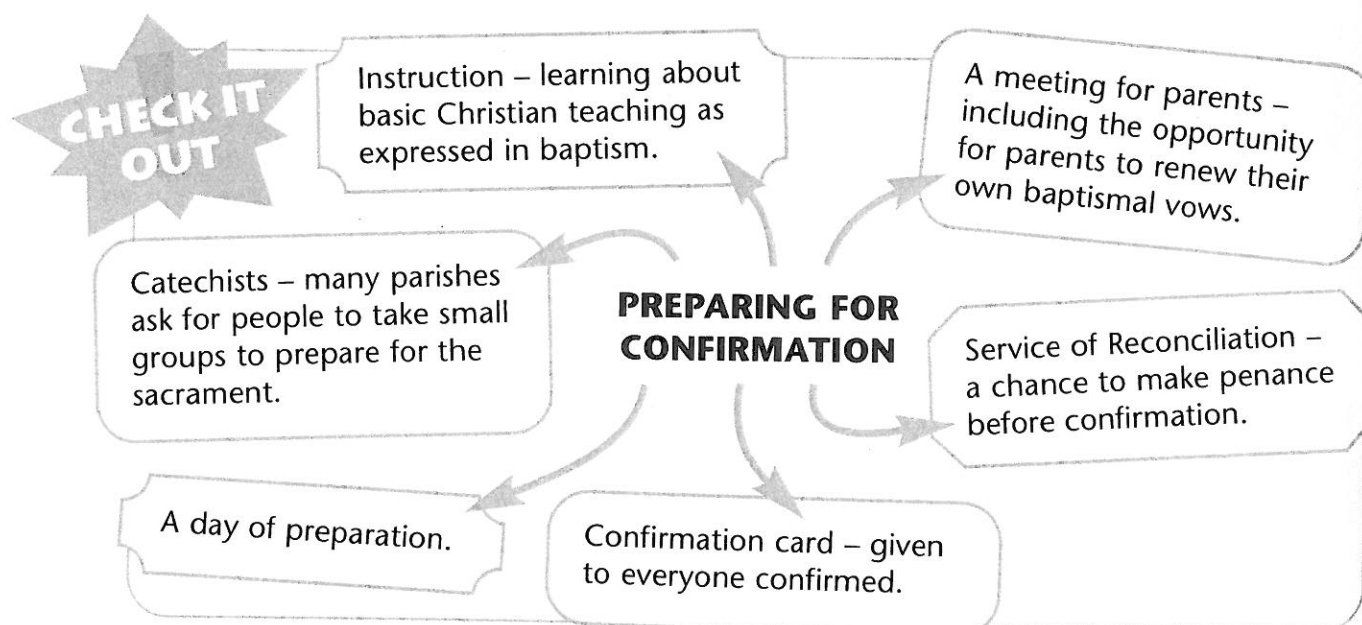
1. How does a priest indicate that a baby is special in the sight of God and in the eyes of the Church?
2. What does the Church believe actually happens when a baby is baptised? Does any 'change' take place in a child or is it all symbolic? If it is symbolic, what does the actual symbolism mean?

**65 CONFIRMATION**

Confirmation gives people who have been baptised the opportunity to renew their baptismal vows and commit themselves to the Christian faith. Traditions that baptise babies also offer confirmation – notably the Orthodox, the Catholic, the Anglican, the Methodist and the United Reformed Churches. Confirmation is a service of Christian initiation. During confirmation, a person receives the Holy Spirit in a special way through the 'laying on' of the bishop's hands.

Preparing for confirmation

Parish programmes designed to prepare candidates for their confirmation vary but they are likely to include:



The age at which people are confirmed varies from Church to Church. In the Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Churches, people can be confirmed from about the age of 11, with Holy Communion following afterwards. In the Catholic Church, children can begin receiving Communion as early as seven, with confirmation following three or four years later. In the Orthodox Church, however, babies are confirmed at the same time as being baptised in a service called **Chrismation**.

The Catholic sacrament of confirmation

Although a bishop usually presides at confirmation, this is not essential. The most popular times for people to be confirmed are Easter and Pentecost. Confirmation normally takes place during a celebration of Mass and includes the following:

- The renewal of baptismal vows. At baptism, these vows were taken by other people (parents and godparents), but now they are made by each person for themselves and include a rejection of all that is evil and a profession of faith in God.

- The bishop extends his hands over those wishing to be confirmed and prays that they might be given the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is an ancient way of calling down the power of God on a person. It was often done in Old Testament times to consecrate a prophet or a king after God had given them a special task to carry out.

A *Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their Helper and Guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.*

(Prayer of bishop)

- Each candidate approaches the bishop in turn together with his or her sponsor. The sponsor places his or her hand on the candidate's shoulder as a sign of support. Placing his or her hand on the candidate's head, the bishop anoints him or her with oil and makes the sign of the cross on his or her forehead. This is the heart of the confirmation service. The bishop says: "Be sealed with the Holy Spirit."

► Christians believe that confirmation is the beginning of a person's lifetime of service to God and to the Church.



- Explain the significance of:
 - the laying on of hands
 - the anointing with oil in the sacrament of confirmation
- Explain the link between baptism and confirmation.
- Explain what lies at the heart of the service of confirmation.

*** DISCUSSION POINT**

Why do you think that a person who was baptised as a baby might want/not want to be confirmed when he or she is older?

**66 BACKGROUND TO THE MASS**

You can find out the details of the Roman Catholic Mass and how it is celebrated in unit 67.

READ: Luke 22.7–23

The Eucharist (the Mass) is the most important sacrament of the Roman Catholic Church. While baptism and confirmation, the other two sacraments of initiation, can only be celebrated once in a lifetime, Catholics are encouraged to celebrate the Eucharist as often as possible. Properly celebrated, it provides a Catholic with spiritual nourishment throughout his or her life.

The Jewish Passover

Celebrated by Jews for centuries, down to the present day, the Passover retells the events of the Exodus – the release of the Jews from Egyptian slavery over 3000 years ago. Before the final plague, the killing of the eldest son in every Egyptian home, the Jews were told to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their homes. The Angel of Death ‘passed over’ every house marked in this way. Each year, at the Passover meal, Jewish parents retell this story to their children. In this way, the memory of this ancient event, the most important in Jewish history, is kept alive. During the retelling, everyone shares, through eating different foodstuffs, the event as if they were there.

The Last Supper

When Jesus met with his disciples for the Last Supper, it was the traditional Passover meal. The unleavened bread and the goblets of wine were on the table as for each Passover meal. Jesus used this Passover meal to teach his disciples something very important about his forthcoming death. To do this, he used the bread and the wine on the table and these were later to become the central elements in the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist:

- the bread was to be the symbol for the body of Jesus, broken on the cross;
- the wine was to be the symbol for the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus.

To Roman Catholics, the Mass is, above all else, a sacrifice. This is why, in the Mass, Jesus is called ‘the Lamb of God’.

A *“Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us’, is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church’s prayer ‘where two or three are gathered in my name’, in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, in the Sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But ‘he is present...most especially in the Eucharistic species.’”*

(CCC 1373)

▼ The Mass, and other celebrations of Holy Communion, are based on the last meal that Jesus enjoyed with his disciples.



1. What is the difference between the Eucharist and the other sacraments of initiation – baptism and confirmation?
2. **a.** What kind of meal was the Last Supper?
b. What use did Jesus make of the bread on the table?
c. What use did Jesus make of the wine on the table?

**67 THE MASS**

Catholics believe that they should prepare themselves spiritually before sharing in the Mass. Those who have committed a grave (mortal) sin should make a personal confession of what they have done to a priest. As the Mass begins with the Penitential Rite so this deals with lesser, venial, sins.

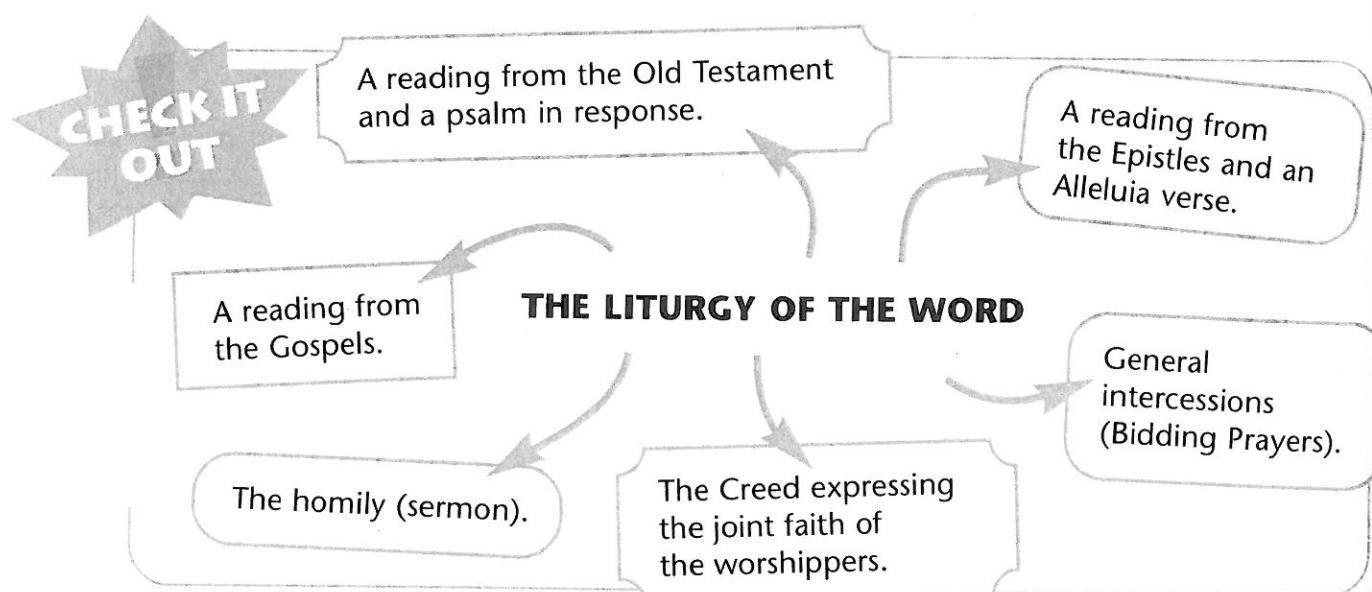
On entering, church worshippers dip their fingers in the holy water which is in a receptacle (the **stoup**) just inside the door and make 'the sign of the cross' on their body. Worshippers can also use some special prayers in the Sunday **Missal** to prepare themselves spiritually for the service.

Celebrating the Mass

There are four parts to the Mass:

1. The Penitential Rite. The congregation confesses to God that they have sinned and ask for divine forgiveness. The priest then grants them absolution.

2 The Liturgy of the Word. As you can see below, the Liturgy of the Word has six parts. This part of the Mass has its origins in the old Jewish synagogue services that brought the people together to pray, and study their Scriptures.



The readings are based on a lectionary that follows a three-year cycle to cover the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and other Biblical passages over this time.

3. The Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with members of the congregation bringing up the people's offerings of bread, wine and gifts for the poor to the altar. The Mass is the people's offering to God and, since the symbols of bread and wine show God's goodness to us, it is right for us to offer some of God's gifts back to him.

The Eucharistic Prayer is at the heart of the celebration of the Mass. Everyone is reminded of their duty to thank God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The priest repeats the words of Jesus at the Last Supper and it is during the saying of this that the bread and wine are changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus. This is indicated by a bell being rung.

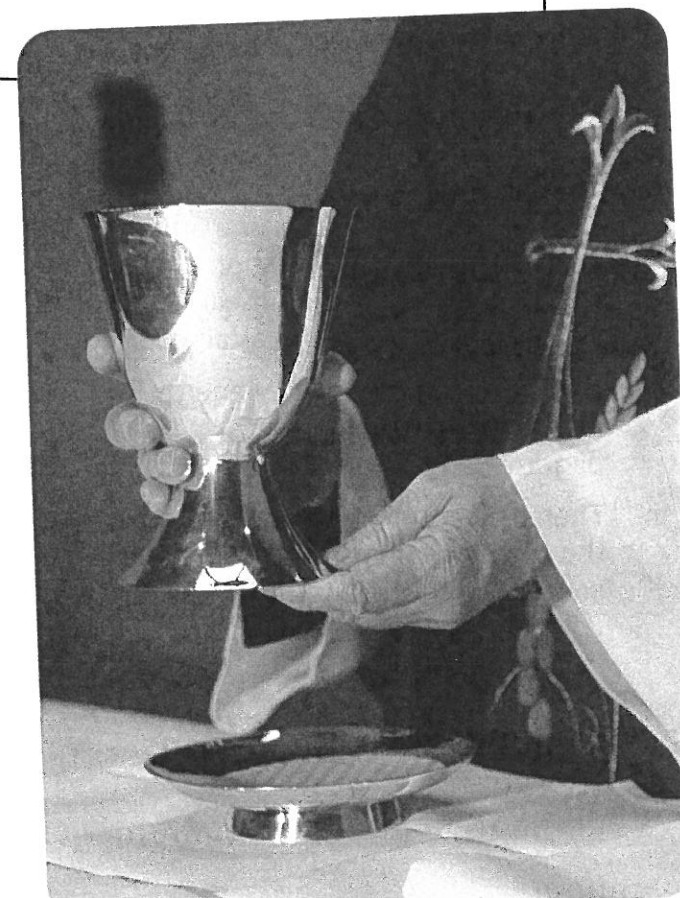
A *“...by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.”*

(CCC 1376)

During the Church Year the Church uses four different Eucharistic prayers and they all:

- call upon the power of the Holy Spirit;
- recount the words of Jesus spoken at the Last Supper;
- ask God's blessing on the Church – the living, the dead and saints from all ages;
- end with the Great Amen, where everyone responds to what has been said with a resounding 'Yes'.

4. The Rite of Communion. The people prepare themselves to receive Christ by saying the Lord's Prayer (the 'Our Father') together and offering one another the Sign of Peace. The priest breaks the consecrated host and places a piece of it in the wine in the chalice. After taking the bread and wine himself, the priest shares them with the congregation. After a time of brief meditation, the Mass ends with the people being blessed and dismissed.



▲ The Mass has a meaning for Catholics that is not shared by most of the other Christians.

1. Describe what happens during the Mass.
2. What is the difference between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist?



68 WHAT THE MASS MEANS TO CATHOLICS

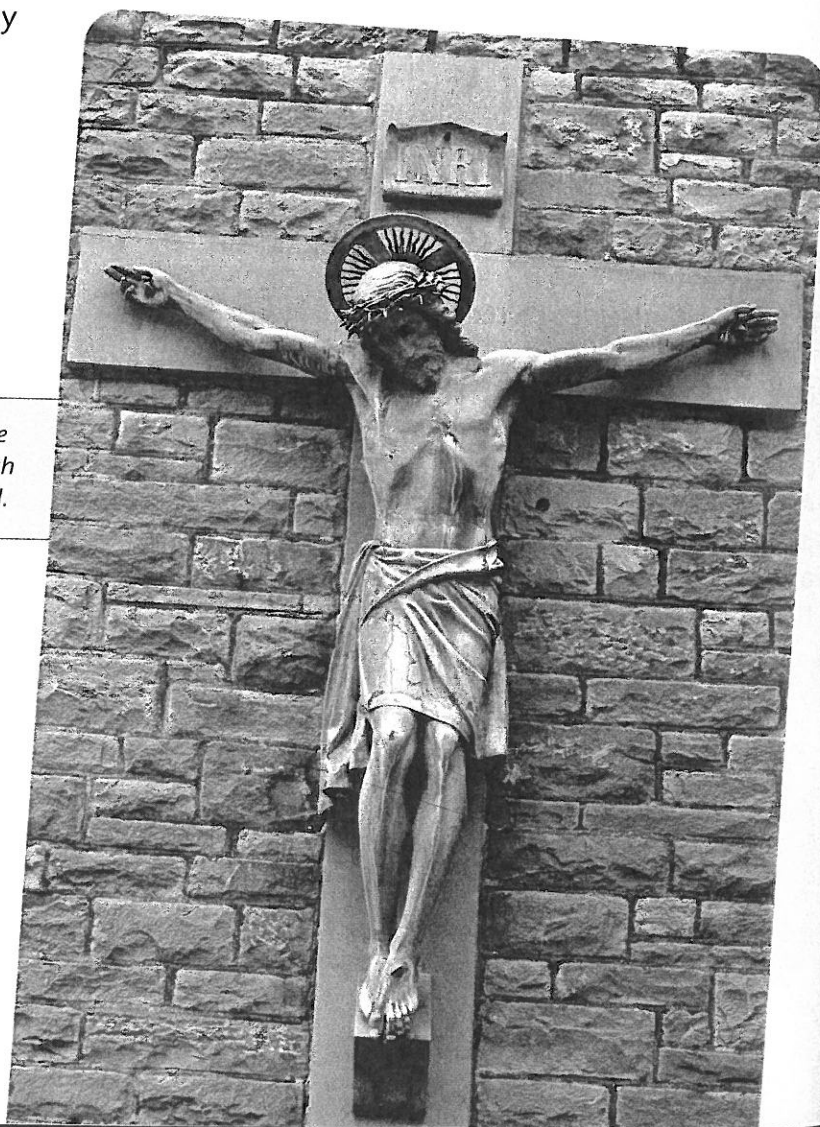
St Thomas Aquinas taught that the Eucharist does for the spiritual life of every Catholic what food does for their bodies. Catholics often speak of the Eucharist as 'regenerating' their spiritual lives. This is why the Catechism says that Catholics "...receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life..." (1212). Elsewhere the Catechism tells us that the Eucharist "remains at the centre of the Church's life" (1343).

The spiritual importance of the Mass

Regularly celebrating the Mass is of immense spiritual importance to every Catholic. When it is celebrated believers can expect that:

- They have been cleansed from their past sins and preserved from committing many future sins.
- The gifts of the Holy Spirit – faith, hope and love – are developed within them by the power of God's same Spirit. St Paul expanded on this theme by referring to the further gifts of wisdom, knowledge, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues (1 Corinthians 12.7–11) as all being gifts from "the one and the same Spirit".
- It gives them the spiritual energy needed to complete their pilgrimage to heaven.
- There is a close link between the celebration of the Mass and eternity (see extract A).

► Catholics believe that each time the Mass is celebrated the death of Jesus on the cross is renewed.



A *“Almighty God, we pray that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven. Then as we receive from this altar the sacred body and blood of your Son, let us be filled with every grace and blessing.”*

(Eucharistic Prayer; The Sunday Missal)

Catholics believe that the Mass gives worshippers an insight into what heaven is like and unites everyone with the 'Church triumphant' – believers in heaven and on earth. This is an insight that Catholics share with believers from the Orthodox Church.

- It puts people into contact with the saving effects of the death of Jesus – eternal life. Each time the Mass is celebrated the sacrifice of Jesus which was offered to God is renewed. It is then offered by the Church to its Father in heaven. The faithful are spiritually nourished by feeding on the body and blood of Jesus.

B *“In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he 'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross...”*

(CCC 1365–66)

- It is an act of Holy 'Communion'. It unites worshippers with God through Jesus. It also unites worshippers with each other in an act of spiritual communion. This takes place through the sharing of bread and the act of giving each other 'the sign of peace'.

1. Describe three spiritual blessings that Catholics enjoy by celebrating the Mass together.
2. "Christians should not need the symbols of bread and wine for them to experience the presence of God." Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view.

* DISCUSSION POINT

'The Mass is so important that it is impossible to imagine anyone being a good Catholic without regularly attending the service.' Do you agree with this comment? Produce arguments on both sides of the divide.



69 HOLY COMMUNION AND OTHER CHURCHES

Among the major Christian Churches only the Salvation Army and the Quakers (the Society of Friends) do not celebrate Holy Communion. They simply do not believe that this sacrament is spiritually necessary. Among the other Churches there are variations in the way that Holy Communion is celebrated and even in the names that the service is given.

The Anglican Church (Holy Communion or the Eucharist)

1. In the **Anglican Church**, of which the Church of England is a part, there are two basic approaches to this service. Some members of this Church hold beliefs that are similar to the Roman Catholic Church and these people are called High Church or Anglo-Catholics. There is also a growing group, called Low Church or Evangelicals, who hold beliefs that are like other Protestants such as Methodists and Baptists.
2. Anglicans call the service the 'Eucharist', which means 'thanksgiving', and this underlines the main thrust of the service for them – an act of thanksgiving for the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Orthodox Church (the Divine Liturgy)

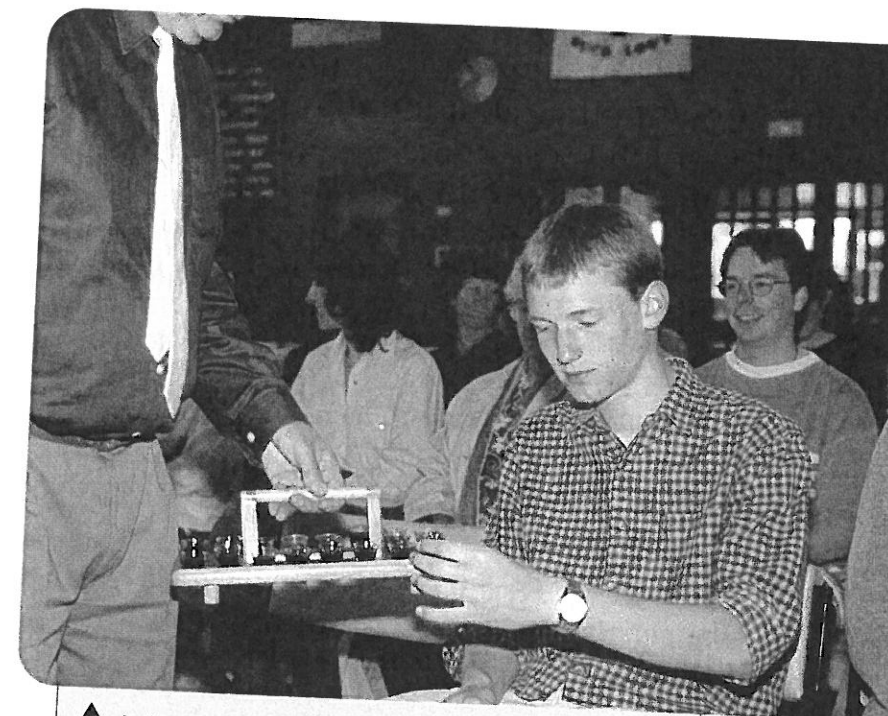
1. A liturgy is a service that follows an ancient and prescribed pattern. The **Divine Liturgy**, followed by the different Orthodox Churches, goes all the way back to the 5th century. It follows a similar pattern to that of the Catholic Mass, with a confession of sins followed by the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the taking of communion.
2. Much of the Divine Liturgy takes place behind the **iconostasis**, a screen hiding the High Altar. This screen symbolises the distance between God and the human race, and also, during the Eucharist, their coming together in the act of communion.
3. Like Catholics, Orthodox Christians believe in transubstantiation – that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus.



▲ As they eat the bread in the service of the Lord's Supper, worshippers are meditating on and remembering the death of Jesus to save them from their sins.

Protestant churches

1. Churches such as the Baptist and Methodist Churches hold similar beliefs about the meaning of this service and also have their own names for it. The two most common names used are:
 - the **Lord's Supper**. This expression was used by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.20. The Lord's Supper was, in the early Church, a time for sharing and fellowship.
 - the **Breaking of Bread**. This is a term taken from the Acts of the Apostles: "On the first day of the week we met for the breaking of bread" (Acts 20.7). It describes the practice of the earliest Christians who frequently met together to share an ordinary meal. Apart from being an act of worship this also fed those who were hungry and needy in the Christian community.
2. In most churches there are four parts to the service: a confession of sins to God and a reading from the Bible; the consecration of the bread and wine to God; the receiving and the eating of the bread and wine; and the sending out of worshippers into the world to serve God.
3. Protestants believe that the bread and wine are symbols and no more. They prompt each worshipper to remember the death of Jesus and to be thankful for it. At no time do they become the actual body and blood of Jesus. This area of disagreement was the major cause of the Reformation in the 16th century, which led to the separation of the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church.



▲ In Baptist churches people hold on to their wine and drink together as a symbol of their unity in Christ.

1. Which two terms do Protestants use for the service of Holy Communion?
2. What is the meaning and significance of each of these terms?



70 THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

There are two Sacraments of Healing in the Catholic Church:

1. The sacrament of penance and reconciliation (confession)

Although the sacrament of penance has been practised by the Catholic Church for centuries, it was given a fresh focus by the Second Vatican Council (1961–65). The Council declared that its purpose was to obtain “pardon from the mercy of God” and to be:

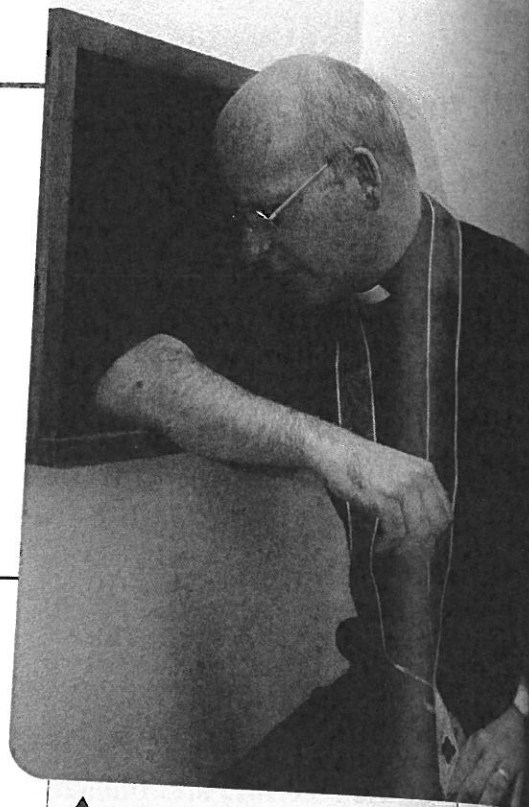
A *“... reconciled with the Church whom (sinners) have wounded by their sin, and who, by its charity, example and prayer, collaborates in their conversion.”*

(Dogmatic Constitution on the Church n.11)

In the 17th century the ‘confessional box’ was introduced to ensure the privacy of penitents. Confession became concerned with confessing sin and receiving absolution from the priest. The Second Vatican Council, however, opened the way to face-to-face conversation, with the priest allowing the penitent to receive more direct counselling and help. Although the priest now knows the identity of the person, he is still bound by the ‘seal of confession’, which means that he cannot reveal anything that is said during confession.

During the act of making a confession the following happens:

1. The penitent is reminded by the priest that God will always forgive the person who is genuinely sorry for his or her sinful behaviour.
2. After the penitent has confessed his or her sins, the priest offers words of encouragement.
3. Once confession has been made and the penance accepted, the ‘act of sorrow’ takes place. Forgiveness can only be offered to those who are genuinely sorry for their past actions (contrition) and show that they are ready to amend their life in future (a firm purpose of amendment).
4. The priest then uses the ministry of forgiveness: a ministry which Jesus gave to his Church. It is not the priest who forgives the penitent but God. The priest pronounces absolution (extract A) and the sacrament of penance is given. The sign of the cross is made over the penitent.



▲ *The old method of hearing confession with the priest and the penitent separated from each other.*

A *“God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son had reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

(The Prayer of Absolution)

2. The sacrament of anointing the sick

Pope Paul VI announced the new sacrament of anointing the sick in 1972. This is intended to assure sick people that they are not alone in their suffering because God is always with them. They can know that through their suffering they are sharing in the sufferings of Jesus and playing a part in the redemption of the world. There are three parts to this sacrament:

1. The priest sprinkles the sick person with holy water as a reminder that he or she first started to follow Jesus after baptism. After Bible readings, the priest lays his hands on the person.
2. The priest anoints the person, using olive oil that was blessed by the bishop at the **Chrism** Mass held on the previous Maundy Thursday.
3. The person takes Holy Communion. The believer’s suffering draws them close to God in a special way through this celebration. If the person is dying then the act of communion is called the ‘**viaticum**’ (‘food for the journey’) and the person is assured that he or she is travelling to his or her Father in heaven.

1. What events lead up to the pronouncement of absolution by the priest in the Sacrament of Penance?
2. What are the three main parts to the sacrament of anointing the sick?

* DISCUSSION POINT

Both of these sacraments are full of symbolism. Why do you think this is very important?