

Typology: The Sacraments of Initiation and the Bible

You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me. ~ John 5:39

THE RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS of Christian initiation gives us the ability to more deeply understand the meaning and mysteries of what God has revealed in Holy Scripture. There are two primary reasons why this is so. First is the personal, firsthand experience of the rites themselves. One who has experienced them is able to identify with the symbolic meaning of the rites.

But the second reason is even more profound. Our soul has been flooded with the grace of God; our spiritual cup overflows (see Ps 23:5). A personal experience of the sacraments and the reception of their particular graces puts us in the position to understand Holy Scripture like never before. We have simply to use well what we have received.

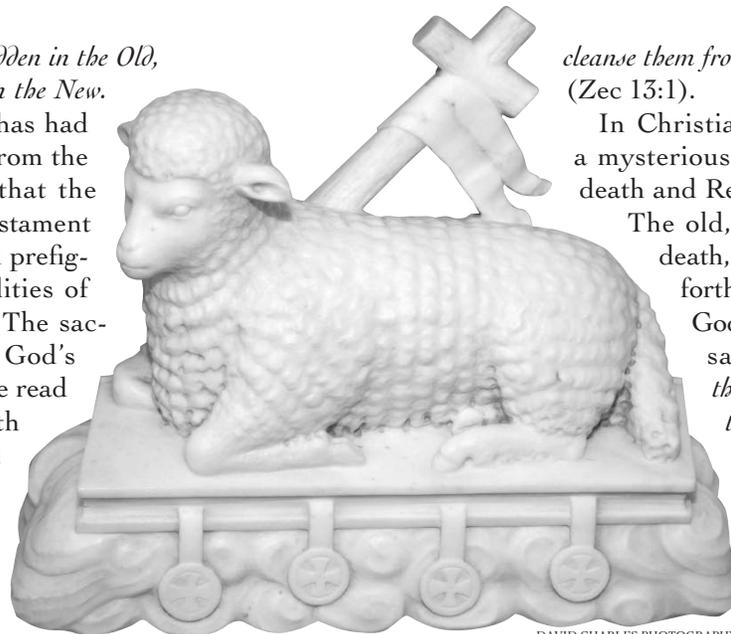
Some Bible Basics

A key idea to keep in mind when reading the Bible is expressed by the following saying:

The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New.

This means that God has had one plan of salvation from the very beginning, and that the purpose of the Old Testament was to prepare for and prefigure the Christian realities of the New Testament. The sacraments were part of God's plan all along, and if we read the Old Testament with the eyes of faith we will soon come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Christ and of what has occurred in the newly-initiated person.

“Something in the Old Testament that prefigures or foreshadows something in the New Testament is a ‘type.’”



The Lamb of God, a powerful symbol of Christ in Scripture

The technical term for something in the Old Testament that prefigures or foreshadows something in the New Testament is the word “type.” The study of such types is called “typology.” Let us now take a look at some of the key Old Testament types of the sacraments of initiation, beginning with the sacrament of Baptism.

Types (Prefigurations) of Baptism

From the beginning, the Church has seen in the great flood and Noah's ark (see Gn 6:1-9:17) a prefiguration of salvation by Christian Baptism. The waters of the flood washed away wickedness from the earth and marked the beginning of a new creation. Water was also a specific element of the prophecies

concerning the Messianic time of salvation: *“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness”* (Zec 13:1).

In Christian Baptism, there is a mysterious participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ.

The old, sinful self is put to death, and a new self comes forth, filled with the life of God. As Holy Scripture says, *“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”* (Rom 6:4). In another passage, St. Paul

says, “[I]f anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17).

A second type or prefigurement of Baptism is the circumcision of male Israelites, beginning with Abraham (see Gn 17:9-14). Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with his people, and made each male a member of the covenantal community and subject to God’s law (see Col 2:11-14). Baptism (for both sexes) replaced circumcision as the means of incorporation into the Christian community (see Col 2:11-14).

A third type of Baptism is the Israelites’ miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. By the almighty power of God working through Moses, the waters of the Red Sea were parted so that the Israelites could pass through it to the other side. After the Israelites had passed through the sea, Moses commanded the waters to return. All of the enemies of Israel who had followed them into the sea were destroyed by the water. The Israelites were once and for all liberated from their cruel slavery to Pharaoh. They were free at last, ready to serve the true God and be his special people.

This event sheds more light on the meaning of Baptism. The newly-baptized person has been freed from what the slavery of the Israelites symbolized. Their (very real physical) slavery symbolized the bondage to sin and to the power of Satan that all humanity has experienced since the fall of Adam and Eve. And just as the Israelites’ enemies were destroyed by the waters of the Red Sea, so the enemies of the human soul are destroyed by the waters of Baptism. The baptized person emerges from the water free from bondage, ready to serve God as a member of his special people, the new Israel, the Church.

A fourth type of Baptism is the crossing of the Jordan River by the Israelites, by which they received the gift of the land. This is the land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. The Promised Land is an image of the eternal life of

Heaven. In Christian Baptism, the baptized cross over through water into the hope of eternal life. And as a guarantee that he will be faithful to his promise of eternal life, through the sacrament of Baptism, God pours out the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the baptized and makes them his children. As his children, we are heirs to all of his promises (see Rom 8:14-17).

A fifth type or prefigurement of Baptism is in the New Testament. It is Christ’s own baptism in the Jordan River by his cousin John, who preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3). Jesus “fulfills all righteousness” (Mt 3:15) and, in doing so, submits to the will of his Father. At Jesus’ baptism, the Heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and the voice of God the Father identified Jesus as his beloved Son with whom he is well pleased (see Mt 3:16-17). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit thereby sanctified the waters.

Through the cleansing water and the words spoken by the minister, the Holy Spirit descends upon the person and begins to dwell within him as a temple. The presence of the Holy Spirit within enables the baptized person to cry out “Abba!” which basically means “Daddy!”

The Holy Spirit within testifies that we have become children of God, and the Father delights in us as his precious and beloved sons and daughters. The baptized person has been born again of water and the Holy Spirit, and is able to enter the Kingdom of God (see Jn 3:5).

Types (Prefigurements) of Confirmation

Let us now take a look at some of the biblical types, or prefigurements, of the sacrament of Confirmation. This very important sacrament is prefigured in the Old Testament by the practice of anointing with oil. These anointings were sacred and were

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Christ blessing a royal couple, 11th century ivory panel

“Confirmation is prefigured by the practice of anointing with oil.”

done to dedicate a person to God. The oil symbolized the Spirit of God. Priests, prophets, and kings were anointed. This symbolized the fact that they were set apart for God and had been given special spiritual power and gifts of the Holy Spirit to be used for a particular work in the service of God.

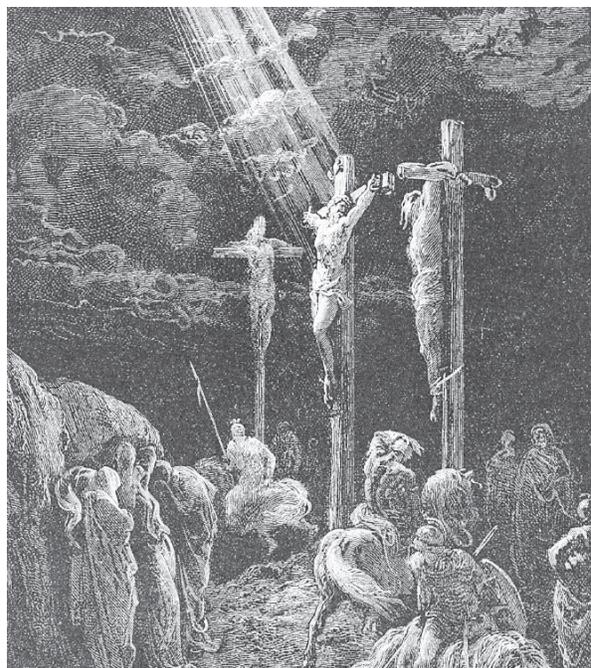
The word “Christ,” which is Greek for the Hebrew word “Messiah,” means “anointed one.” Jesus Christ is “the Anointed One,” for within him dwells the fullness of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. In Baptism we are joined to Christ, made members of his Church, and given a share in his roles of priest, prophet, and king. Through Confirmation, we are all anointed with the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This gift of the Holy Spirit perfects the gifts of grace received in Baptism.

It also strengthens the soul so that the confirmed Catholic is clothed with “*power from on high*” (Lk 24:49; see also Acts 1:8). This spiritual power enables us to give powerful public witness to Christ and to live out our Christian lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. This will help us to overcome all obstacles to our salvation (see Lk 24:49; Acts 2:1-11; Rom 8:31-39). This anointing of the Holy Spirit also strengthens us to endure suffering and persecution for the name of Christ (see Mt 5:11-12; Acts 5:41; Jas 1:2, 12; 1 Pt 4:12-19).

Types (Prefigurements) of the Holy Eucharist

Of the many types of the Holy Eucharist in the Old Testament, we will look at two of the most important. The first type of the Eucharist we will consider is the Jewish Passover ritual. The details of this ritual were given by the Lord to Moses. The Lord commanded the Israelites to celebrate this ritual as a feast every year. Both the meaning of the Passover ritual and the details of the Passover meal are important to understand.

The origin of the Passover feast goes back to the time when the Israelites were still slaves to the Egyptians. Because Pharaoh, the king of the Egyptians, refused to let the Israelites go free, the Lord punished him and the Egyptians. The Lord sent plagues upon the Egyptians, each one being worse than the one before. After nine plagues, Pharaoh had still refused to set the Israelites free.

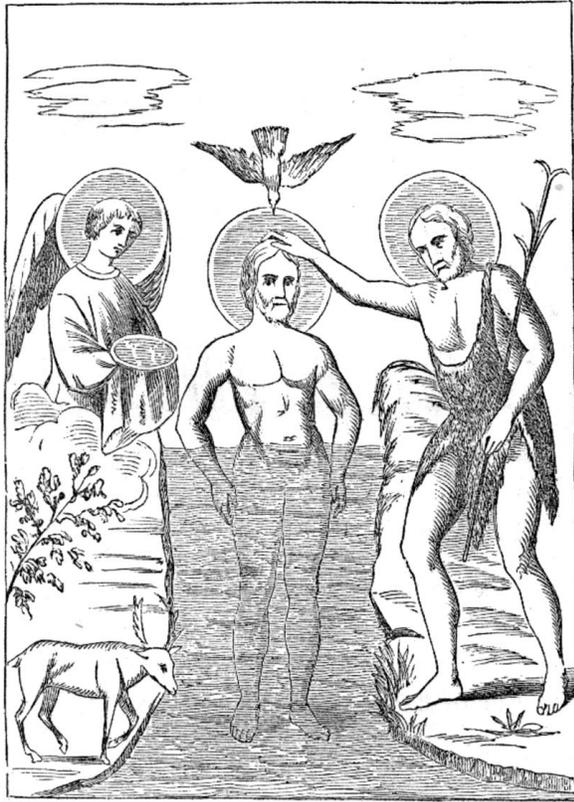


Crucifixion, by Gustave Doré, 1855-1885

As the tenth and final plague, the Lord sent his angel to slay all the firstborn of the Egyptians. But the Lord “passed over” all the houses of the Israelites who obeyed his instructions. He commanded each Israelite household to kill a male, unblemished lamb, in the evening. Then they were to sprinkle some blood of the lamb on their doorposts. The Lord said that every Israelite house that had the blood of the lamb on its doorpost would be passed over and no one would be harmed. After sprinkling the lamb’s blood on their doorposts, they were to eat the flesh of the lamb (roasted) that night, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They were to eat this “Pass-over” meal in a certain way: eating quickly, dressed for travel, with sandals on their feet and staffs in their hands (see Ex 5:1-12:30). All of this was intended to remind them of God’s mighty deeds that liberated them from bondage and of their hasty departure from Egypt. The Jews have always believed that, when they celebrate the Feast of Passover each year, in some mysterious way what God had done for them in the past became present to them again.

Why is all of this so important? It is because the Last Supper, which is where the Holy Mass was instituted, was celebrated by Jesus as a Passover meal. This means that understanding the meaning of the Passover meal will deepen our understanding of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

We learn in the New Testament that the whole purpose of the Jewish Passover ritual and the Exo-



Baptism of Jesus by John, fresco in a 5th century catacomb near Rome

was to prefigure the true “Passover.” The bondage of the Israelites symbolized the bondage that has affected all humanity since the fall of Adam and Eve, the real bondage to sin and the power of the devil. And it is this bondage that we are liberated from by the precious Blood of the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, “who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29; see also Jn 3:16; Rom 6:23; Heb 2:14-15; 1 Jn 3:8).

The Jewish Passover meal foreshadowed the time when the flesh of the true Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, would be eaten to celebrate the true Passover for all humanity — the liberation of humankind from the bondage of sin. This occurred for the first time on the night when Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his apostles (see Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-20).

The second Old Testament type of the Holy Eucharist considered here is the manna that God gave

the Israelites to eat in the desert. While on their journey to the Promised Land, the Lord had mercy upon them and miraculously provided a kind of bread that they had never seen before (see Ex 16:14-15). They called it “*manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey*” (Ex 16:31). This miraculous bread foreshadowed the time when God would give the “true bread from Heaven,” which is Jesus Christ. Jesus said to his Jewish audience:

I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.... Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from Heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from Heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.... he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (Jn 6:35, 47-51, 54-56).

With all of this in mind, let us now read about the Last Supper, where Jesus fulfills all that the Old Testament had foreshadowed. This was the “earnestly desired” moment (see Lk 22:15) when Jesus would nourish those he loved with his own Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity:

Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:26-29).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the sacraments of Christian initiation have been part of God’s plan all along. Through the study of types, we have deepened our understanding of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist. May this knowledge help us to always treasure these precious gifts of God’s boundless love and mercy.

(CCC 117, 128-130, 527, 535-536, 1217-1225, 1286-1289, 1333-1335)

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