

## *The Catholic Sacraments*

I buried a nickel under the porch when I was 8, she said, but one day my grandma died & they sold the house & I never got to go back for it.

A nickel used to mean something, I said.

She nodded. It still does, she said & then she started to cry.

Story People – Brian Andreas



Read first 4 chapters of Cooke. What we are doing in the first two classes is establishing the building blocks for talking about sacrament.

Scripture, John 1:1 – 5, 10 – 14

## *Symbols and Sacrament*









### Discussion Questions

1. In your experience what are the most powerful symbols in our culture today?
2. What are your favorite (or most meaningful) symbols or family rituals?
3. Do you consider yourself a sacrament (an outward sign that comes from God to show God's favor)?



## *Sacraments Overview*

### Class Overview

-  Symbols & Sacrament
-  Jesus & Church as Sacrament
-  Eucharist
-  Christian Initiation
-  Matrimony
-  Orders
-  Reconciliation
-  Anointing of the Sick



## *Focus on the Sacraments*

We will concentrate on how we, as laity, build our relationship with God through participation in the Sacraments. There are three fundamental assumptions that we will build on:

1. We participate in church to transform our lives.
2. We are made in the image of God.
3. We are capable of choosing the type of person we will become.

The three assumptions contradict three misconceptions about the church.

- 1) Many people participate in church for social interaction or to hear a homily that “makes me think” or “makes me feel good.”
- 2) We have a very high calling – to more perfectly image God. This is what it means to be fully human. Being sinners is not what defines us. Being made in the image of God does define us.
- 3) We are not able to choose to be more talented, rich, or famous, but we can choose to be a good, loving and honest person.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

- ☞ Signs – Straightforward and physical
  - ☞ Street sign
- ☞ Symbols – Multiple meanings/dimensions
  - ☞ Can't be precisely defined when expressing emotional and spiritual truths.
  - ☞ We do some of our best “word descriptions” when we use metaphors.
    - ☞ We are the Body of Christ.
    - ☞ God is the air I breathe.
  - ☞ Meaning changes with experience.

Symbols are a complex form of signs. They are the only tool we have to describe God. They provide great insight and great frustration. Symbols are mushy and defy logical, concrete definition. It is not that we don't know what the symbol means – it is that what it means cannot be put into words easily (Cooke, pg. 45). We live in a time when logical thought is highly valued. Symbolism suffers greatly in this environment, because when you “get the meaning” it can't be analyzed logically.

They express an area of human awareness where what we think and feel can never be said in a perfectly clear way. This occurs when we discuss the spiritual, the emotional, fears, dreams, or imagination.

Jesus taught in symbols all the time. When we reject the symbolism, we are left with only the physical meaning, which leads to fundamentalism.

Ex: The present trend of cutting art and music classes because they are not as “important” as science. Music is being justified by its effect on math skills!

Ex: Lack of etiquette in business and email interactions, because courtesy is considered “a waste of time.” The problem is that even this is symbolic! It expresses the value of the person we are dealing with.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

What do these symbols mean to you?

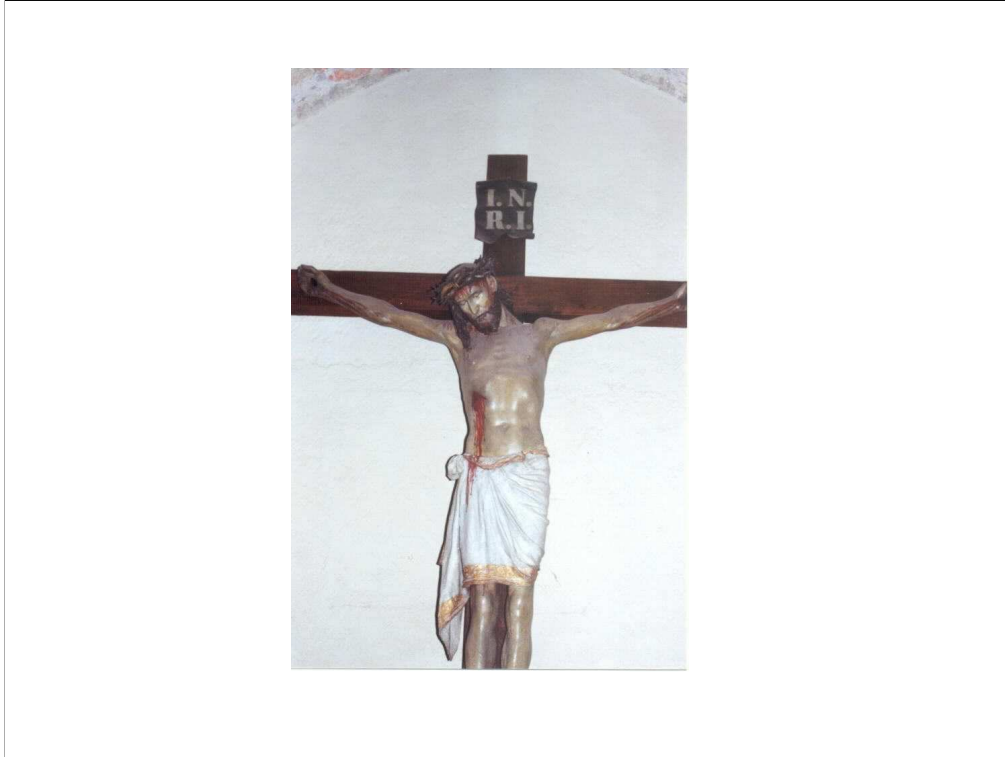




Just a piece of cloth tied to a pole?

What words come to mind? Power, freedom, idealism, great sacrifice, hope. Could other people in other countries see this symbol very differently? Imperialism, greed, oppressor

The meaning of the flag changes based on your experience. Someone who fought for our country probably has a different view of the flag than a "draft dodger." Post 9/11 the flag has a different meaning.



What words come to mind? Suffering, dedication, salvation, love, cruelty, intolerance, death, resurrection, loving God, commitment

Different crucifixes carry different meanings. This crucifix shows Jesus to be very human.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

- ☞ Meaning of symbols is not straightforward.
- ☞ Reactions can be “no effect” to emotional and/or spiritual upwelling.
  - ☞ Remember the poem at the beginning of class?

Remember the poem that we started class with? The friend saw little meaning in the buried nickel. To the friend, it was lost change, worth more “back then” because of inflation (purely physical meaning). It had no/little symbolic value. To the girl who buried the nickel there was great symbolic value, the physical value was minimal.

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## *Symbols and Sacrament*

Symbols are fundamental for creating community!

- ☞ We communicate and “connect” through symbols.
- ☞ When people gather together, they invariably do something of a ritualistic and symbolic nature.
  - ☞ Celebrate an anniversary, birthday, Thanksgiving, wedding, funeral.
  - ☞ Akbar’s gift.

Nearly every interaction with other people is governed by symbolism. How we dress, how we greet (shake hands, smile, hug), what we say and don’t say during conversations, and how and when we leave.

Ritual means a prescribed order of events. By prescribing the order of events, we make it clear to the people we are dealing with what is happening and how to respond to convey meaning. (more on ritual later)

Akbar is an engineer that I work with. He lives in Portland, OR, and is an immigrant from Iran. He is a devote Muslim with a strong sense of God and community. When he came to visit me for the first time he brought several gifts, including a hand-made pen and pencil desk set. Here’s the sequence of events.

tj: Oh, you didn’t have to do that!

Akbar: It is my pleasure. Thank you for your hospitality.

Tj: It is beautiful.

Akbar: It is handmade from my country. Akbar explains the process.

Tj: It is too much.

Later Akbar talks to his wife. She immediately asks if we liked his gift. Akbar answers, “Yes, they said it was too much.”

**See how this builds community? See how it is difficult to put into words exactly why/how this builds community?**

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

 We interpret experience through symbols.

Next slide



Raising the flag at the World Trade Center was a pure symbolic act. There was no “logical” reason to do it. There were plenty of other things that were more important to the clean-up effort.

That said, it was a powerful symbol. The collapsed building in the background. People who had lost so much raising the flag on a partially toppled pole. The symbol built community and reminded people of the marines raising the flag at Iwo Jima.



Fr. Mychal Judge was the first confirmed victim from the World Trade Center. He was one of the 5 chaplains for the NY fire department. He was a priest who was remembered as being a very good counselor, friend, and advocate. He was popular in many social circles because he was able to make the people he talked to feel like they were the only ones in a room. He took great pride in remembering the names of family members of the firemen. He was quick to bless people.

When he was carried from the collapsed tower, he was brought to St. Peter's church and laid on the altar with his fireman's helmet. What does that say about his life and his death?

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

- ☞ We interpret experience through symbols.
- ☞ Experiences that are particularly meaningful often become rituals:
  - ☞ Going to Grandma's on Christmas
  - ☞ The Last Supper

Remember how we defined symbols? Symbols express what we think and feel, but can't be expressed in words precisely. The story about Fr. Mike really shows the power of symbols. I think is impossible to plumb the depths of all the meaning that came from the firemen's act (experience).

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

How are symbols and ritual intertwined?

- ✦ Ritual is how we define our communities
  - ✦ Celebrations help us to pass on our identity
- ✦ Ritual also helps us to interpret our experience.
  - ✦ Laying Fr. Mike's body on the altar was meaningful *because of* the ritual and symbolism of the Mass.
- ✦ Rituals utilize symbolism to express meaning.

Symbols are fundamental for creating community, and how we use those symbols in ritual is how we define who we are. (Cooke, pgs 40 – 41)

Celebrations are a form of ritual where we “pass on” the significance of key events in our history. We celebrate President's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving – all of which give meaning to what it means to be an American.

Our church celebrations also pass on who we are. The Sacraments, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Holy days of Obligation all contribute to an understanding of what it means to be Catholic..

When we participate in these celebrations we pass on the heart of what it means to be us. The only way to participate is to know what to expect, to understand the ritual that is involved. If you don't understand the ritual, you can't participate. This is what makes it so difficult to cross cultural boundaries. We don't really understand the rituals and all their implications, so we don't really fit in.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

Liturgy is a form of ritual celebration

- ✦ Because these rituals celebrate the deepest of all human experiences (our relationship with God), they are highly symbolic.
  - ✦ We must participate if they are to retain their true meaning. Otherwise they will become “magic.”
- ✦ All religions make use of rituals and symbolism, but many do not use the word “sacrament” to describe these rituals.

The only way to have a celebration be really meaningful is if we participate in it. If we don't participate, the ritual does not impact us. When this happens we lose our appreciation for the meaning in the ritual. If this happens, particularly in religious ritual, the meaning is viewed as magic implemented by others.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

Catholic sacraments are formal ritual celebrations of our relationship with God.

- ☒ There are seven Catholic sacraments
  - ☒ Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Marriage, Holy Orders, Anointing of the sick.
  - ☒ Eucharist was probably established by Jesus.
  - ☒ The other sacraments developed over time.
    - We'll discuss this in the following weeks.



## *Symbols and Sacrament*

In addition to the “Big 7,” there are lots of informal rituals that celebrate our relationship with God.

- ✦ Kneeling when we pray
- ✦ Bowing before the altar
- ✦ Sign of the Cross
- ✦ Rosary
- ✦ Ashes, etc.



## *Symbols and Sacrament*

### Quick switch: A little church history!

- ☒ For the first 300 years of Christianity it was illegal, and potentially deadly, to be a Christian.
- ☒ Good news: Great faith and dedication in the church.
- ☒ Bad news: Disorganization, lots of heresies.

We need to get a sense of how we arrived where we are today. To do that, we'll briefly review a few key historic events in church and sacrament that will help to explain why "everything changed a few (40) years ago."

Sacramental life was shared by everyone. Initiation into the community was a big deal because of the risk to the community and the person being initiated through baptism, confirmation, and eucharist.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

### A little more church history!

- ☒ Then Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire
  - ☒ Good news: no persecution
  - ☒ Bad news: everybody is a “Christian”
  - ☒ More bad news: Politics and religion mixed

Becoming the official religion deeply affected the sacraments. All of a sudden, initiation into the community carried no risk and little commitment. Eucharist, which was a house church based event now becomes more impersonal, shared in large congregations led by politically appointed priests and bishops.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

### A little sacramental history

- ✦ From the Middle Ages (1100s) until the 1960's sacraments were "done" by the priest.
- ✦ This was not consistent with the early Church experience (30s – 500s) of ritual celebrations in which everyone was a participant.
- ✦ What's a church to do?



Eventually the role of the laity in sacrament is completely lost. By the middle ages sacraments were "done" by priests. People had little understanding of the rituals. This was a very different church than the early church.

## *Symbols and Sacrament*

The Second Vatican Council (1960s) restored the Church to the early understanding of sacrament.

“In the wake of Vatican II ... there are no watchers in sacraments, only doers, and the catechesis [education] proper to doers, mystagogy [interpretation of the mysteries], is intended to illuminate not only what one sees, but more deeply what one experiences with all the senses. The awareness to which the sacraments aim to lead the participants is not the “I understand” or “I see” of a cognitive appeal, but rather the “Amen”, the surrender, of the whole person to the fullness of that in which we are engaged.”

Peter Fink, pg. 8 of Noll



## *Symbols and Sacrament*

### Renewal of the Catholic Sacraments

☒ Recapture the ideas that:

☒ Christ and the church are sacraments in a broader sense: *Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.*

☒ The seven Sacraments are based upon these two broader signs from God – Christ and the church.

– We'll talk about this next time.



## *Symbols and Sacrament*

Why is renewal important?

- ✦ By the 1900s many Catholics thought of sacraments as a form of magic – the priest says the magic words and “grace” from God is deposited into the soul.



## *Symbols and Sacrament*

Why is renewal important?

- ✦ What the great theologians had been saying all along was that grace is a “quality,” a growth in the relationship between God and people.
- ✦ This renewal recaptured this sense of grace.



## *Symbols and Sacrament*

### Summary

- ☞ Sacrament is more art than science, more relational than physical. It is about our relationship with God – how it grows, and how we recognize and celebrate it.
- ☞ It is not a measure of achievement like a high school diploma.
- ☞ Sacraments affect the quality of our relationship with God.

