

# ***Sacrament: the moment of meeting God***

In our Retreat we will be exploring the Church's sacramental life.

*Sacramentum* was the Latin term for a Roman soldier's oath of loyalty to the Emperor. By it he made his life over to Caesar in an act of *consecration*, celebrated with the throwing of incense into the fire before a statue of the Emperor's divine *genius*. (Clearly a Christian could not do this.)

**Guaranteed by Christ** In Christian usage, a sacrament is a moment of encounter with God guaranteed by its institution by Christ, and by the teaching of the Church. This encounter depends not on the deserts of the minister or of those receiving the sacrament, but on Christ's promise to be with his Church until the end of time. If the sacraments are celebrated unworthily, recipients can impede their effectiveness or ignore their effects, but the sacrament is still celebrated and its nature as *a moment where Christ can be met* is not affected.

## ***First Talk***

In the first talk, we think of the impact Jesus had on those who met him in the gospels. It was impressive! He had a tremendous power to capture people's hearts, not by overwhelming them, but by attracting them. They saw in him

- *a blessedness or fulness of humanity* for which they were willing to leave their present careers behind.
- *a goodwill* which enabled them to trust him, even with their known failings, defects, disabilities, and exclusion from decent society; and
- *a power* which held out to them a promise of reconciliation and renewal, of healing, of a share in his own blessed life.

Set together, these three things constitute the offer of a human encounter like no other, a relationship of unique power and value, the possibility of an access to life drawing its meaning from the identity between Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Son of God. What they saw in a human form, was God. That is what liberated their lives (*consecration*) and bound them to his life (*sacrament*).

Our encounter with Christ, in the sacramental mode, must have the same character. Our Retreat is going in search of that meeting with God in Jesus.



***Eternal Life*** – *a life which shares the divine qualities people glimpsed in Jesus. By sharing the fulness of the Father's love as Jesus did, by the gift of the Holy Spirit which filled him, we are reborn to a new life as children of God and members of Christ's body. The self-communication of God lifts up our human life to a new and undeserved level, and transforms us into persons who can begin to anticipate the*

*future life of heaven. The sacraments are the key moments where this life can be generated and lived.*

**Glory** – *the dynamic experience of the presence of God is the awareness of his glory. This awareness transforms the seer, so that the divine radiance takes first place, ahead of all other possible experiences of beauty, truth, or joy. Glorification is the mystery whereby a human being is infused with this divine knowledge, and accordingly filled with overwhelming awareness of God.*

May I suggest that we meditate, after the talk, on **the priestly prayer of Jesus** at the Last Supper, which you will find in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John?

*Try not to be distracted – for instance by the mention of “one who chose to be lost” – from the great shape of this prayer.*

You might like to think about a few questions, for instance:

- How does Jesus pray for himself? What does he want God to do for him on the vigil of his death? (*There is no “agony in the garden” in this Gospel.*)
- How does Jesus speak about us: what does it mean that the Father has “taken us from the world” to give us to Jesus (v 6)?
- Why is it so important for us to realise that Jesus has “come from God” (vv 7-8, 21, 23, 25)?
- How is he “no longer in the world” (v 11)? What about us and the world (vv 11, 14–16, 18)?
- What does *consecrated in the truth* mean for us (v 17)?
- What does Jesus most insistently ask for the Church?

