

The Sacraments of Baptism and Communion

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During April and May, I prepared three children for their first communion. The children, who were baptized as babies, have seen the people around them taking communion and are eager to join in. This is the time to teach them about the sacraments of baptism and communion. What makes something a sacrament?

1) Jesus commanded it. Before his ascension Jesus told his disciples to go to all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples, "Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is my blood. Do this for the remembrance of me."

2) It involves the word of God. Every time we baptize, we connect the baptized person's name to the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Every time we have communion, we repeat exactly what Jesus said to his disciples. These words are God's words, spoken personally to us!

3) It involves a physical element. We baptize with water. The water by itself doesn't make a baptism, but with the word of God, water becomes a life-giving rebirth. We eat bread and wine at communion. By themselves bread and wine don't make communion, but with the word of God they become the holy meal of Jesus.

4) It forgives sin and gives new life. In baptism, as Peter told the crowds during his Pentecost sermon, our sins are forgiven. We are reborn new as God's own children. In communion, Jesus himself comes to us. He gives us his body and blood "for the forgiveness of sins." This restores us to life with God.

5) It joins us to Jesus and to all the other members of the church. In baptism, we become part of the holy people of God. We are made members of the body of Christ. We receive the Holy Spirit that fell upon all believers on Pentecost. In communion, we all eat and drink of Christ's body and blood. That makes us into one body with each other.

These are the things that the two sacraments of baptism and communion have in common. Is there anything different between them?

The biggest difference is who they are for. Baptism is for people outside the church. Baptism is what brings people into the church and makes them part of Christ's body. Baptism is the beginning of our life with God, our new birth. Therefore, like regular birth, it happens only once. One baptism only!

Communion is for people already inside the church and already baptized. Baptized people are part of Christ's body. Therefore they are invited to share in his body and blood at communion. You can take communion as often as you want! Not just once, as often as you can.

The three children will have their first communion on Pentecost Sunday, May 28. Please pray for them that it will be a blessing and strengthen their faith!