

Course: STD 440

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How My Understanding of the Sacraments Has Changed, Grown or Been Challenged

This course, for a myriad of reasons, has been a challenge and it has forced me to change and to grow in my thinking. The readings and the reflective assignments have had me look back on my life and assess my relationship and interactions with the Church and its sacraments. As I have demonstrated through my writings over the last three weeks, I have been drawn to making a direct connection to the sacraments that have affected and influenced my life. The lectures, readings and class discussions have provided me with a wealth of information to confirm, re-evaluate and rethink my view of the sacraments and their place not only in the Church but also in my life. I will be writing from my experiences and what I have learned in the course about baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, reconciliation and marriage.

One of the biggest challenges that I faced was dealing with the first week of material where we are discovering what sacraments mean and the different concepts that are associated with them; such as sacramental theology, *sacramentum tantum*, *sacramentum et res* and *res tantum*. After, when we entered into the second half of the course and we delved into each of the separate sacraments, the journey to discover the sacramental realities was not an easy one. I cannot imagine trying to decode the second half of the course without the primer given in the first half. Another thing that I realised is that if I didn't have the previous nine religious courses under my belt, this class would have shaken my religious beliefs. I can easily understand how some people have walked out of courses like this one for fear of losing one's faith. Not to say that I was challenged in that way, but I can comprehend how it happens.

Baptism and Eucharist were the easiest for me to make connections to and to see the sacramental realities they shared. I also understand how, from a reformers' point of view that these two sacraments would be kept. These are two sacraments that can be traced back to the time of Jesus and his mission on earth and are evidenced in the New Testament. They are the easiest to see the *sacramentum et res* in action within our daily lives. For me they are the two most recent sacraments I have partaken in and I feel very strongly about the saving grace they provide to me and to my family. I strive to live up to the promise that I will raise my children to be loving and caring people and the sacramental realities that these sacraments provide are able to make me achieve this to the best of my ability.

Confirmation and reconciliation had to be the most challenging for me to be able to perceive the sacramental realities in them. In regards to confirmation, there is so much potential that we could be bringing into a stronger relationship with the youth and young adults in Church. One of the easiest ways to stem the tide of people leaving the Church is to empower them. Confirmation is one of those times where a challenge can be brought to the young people and to get involved within the Church. What is important is that the elders of the Church community must provide the opportunities for the youth to become directly involved in a meaningful way. Within my parish, our priest is an outdoors sports enthusiast, and he began to create weekend ski trips to Banff and Jasper twice a winter to build up the connection between himself and the youth within his parish. The first group that went were the teens that had just completed the sacrament of confirmation. Over the span of a few years the ski trips have become very popular, and it is now the youth of the parish that have taken over the tasks of planning, preparing and sharing this event with the community. One of the members of this group ran and succeeded in joining the parish council. It is the small actions of the Church leaders that can have a big impact on the young adults and make them feel they are an important part of the Church community, which they are. The sacrament of reconciliation can have the same ability to bring those that may feel disconnected, through their sins, back into a healthy relationship with God and in the process, the Church. While reconciliation is thought of as more of an individual sacrament, there are still times

throughout the liturgical year to make those who feel out of place to reconnect and find a deeper understanding in the Lord.

Of all the sacraments that truly threw me for a loop from what I thought I knew and what I truly did know was the sacrament of marriage. I must admit I found the chapter on marriage at times disheartening, and what I took from the sacrament and what I was reading was like two different things altogether. The theology from the idea of a contract was something that had honestly never entered into my mind. While I could and did understand this concept of marriage as a form of contract for the Patristic and Middle Ages, I could not apply the same thoughts of relationship to the sacrament I went through with Michelle, eight years ago yesterday. As I mentioned earlier in the course, I saw my union with Michelle through how Schillebeeckx presented it and that we were communicating God's grace through the sacrament. Our marriage provided us with spiritual growth. It provided me with a new conception of reality in which I, through my marriage with Michelle, was now a whole person and that I also had a deeper and more spiritual connection to God. My marriage is my *sacramentum et res*, it is my spiritual reality and all I need to do is look at my family and know that outside of the Church I will not find anything else that will come close to connecting me to God.

This course has been more than a challenge and a struggle. I have put in long hours of reading and writing and have not spent quality time with my family, which has hurt them, especially the younger ones. But as I reach the end of the course I am left feeling a sense of accomplishment and that I have achieved my goal of completing my graduate degree in religious education. I feel I have completed this task and this course in particular with a deeper understanding of the sacraments and that I have gifts and talents I will be able to share not only with my students but also with my school community and parish community.