

# Holy Trinity Redditch



# Life

## Lent 2 Sacraments

John 3:1-17

‘If angels could be jealous of [humans] they would be for one reason: Holy Communion’ (Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, Priest and Martyr).

The sacraments are vital to our existence as the body of Christ. The gospel for the Second Sunday in Lent has Jesus speaking to Nicodemus, ‘who came to Jesus by night’ about matters of eternal life (John 3:2). The discussion essentially turns to the question of how does one receive eternal life? What is the means for God to deliver his promises to us? Jesus’ statement is simple and yet the subject of much controversy in the Church ‘unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’ (John 3:5). The majority of commentators agree that Jesus is alluding to water baptism here (Michaels, 2010, p. 182). Baptism, in this instance, is the means by which God is able to bring Nicodemus into the kingdom of God.

Water does not bring people into the kingdom in and of itself. The only reason why Baptism brings people into the kingdom of God is because it is the means by which God in his sovereignty has chosen to do things. God has chosen to operate through water and by the invocation of the names of the persons of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) to bring people into everlasting life. I can’t explain how or even why God does it this way. But the question that the sacraments pose to us is this: Do you believe that God will do what he says he will do?

Do you believe that through Baptism we become members of the Kingdom of God? Because that is what Jesus says he will do? I started with a quote from Fr. Maximilian Kolbe who was martyred in Auschwitz during the Second World War. He is saying humanity is given a greater intimacy with God than even angels experience, through Holy Communion. Do you believe that which is received in Holy Communion is the body and blood of Christ? Without both these benefits there is no Church. The Church together with the preached word is generated through the Sacraments.

One last bit of theology from the late, Lutheran, theologian Robert W. Jenson who summarises the internal reality of the sacraments with such beauty and clarity. ‘[In] the Eucharist we come together to live the Kingdom’s fellowship beforehand. But our coming together, however faithful and pious, does not locate us at the gate of heaven, unless God puts us there. That he does is the content of faith that has the Supper itself as the external object to which it clings’ (1999, p.216). The question is do you believe this? Do the outer appearances of the sacrament cling to the promise of God? Do you believe and receive God’s promises to you?

## To Reflect upon this week

1. Think back to your earliest memory of the sacraments (perhaps your own baptism or witnessing a baptism or receiving Holy Communion for the first time) what did the sacraments mean to you then and now?
2. Sacraments are a material means for God to work in the world. How can you be a living sacrament, a means for God to work in the world?
3. The Church of England has 2 Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion) but also 5 other rites which are “sacramental”. A full list and summary can be found here (taken from the draft version of the Parish Rule of Life) <https://tinyurl.com/v2yqhtk>. Read through them and begin to reflect how they relate to different parts of the bible.
4. How might you engage with the sacraments in a new way? Is God calling you to explore them afresh or engage with a sacramental rite in a new way.
5. If you’ve never thought about the ways in which the church year is indicated by the liturgical colours, try and research that.
6. In the Sacraments the Church presents material things to God for his purposes (Water, Bread and Wine) how can “the works of human hands”, our material gift be used for the purposes of God?

Francis Moloney, March 2020

## References

Jenson, R. W. (1999) Systematic Theology Volume 2: The Works of God. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Michaels, J. R. (2010) The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of John. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

All scripture references from the English Standard Version (ESV).