

Why Do Catholics....Believe in Seven Sacraments?

The Question: A common question from our Protestant brothers and sisters is: "Why do Catholics have seven Sacraments? We only have two. So where in the bible is your seven supported?" How do you respond and defend this Catholic belief? We are going to look at a couple of ways.

What Does the Bible Say? Always a good place to start when discussing this topic with Protestants, as some believe in Sola Scriptura, or Bible Alone for teaching. So, here are seven verses from the Bible (and a definition of the sacrament) that support each sacrament:

- Baptism: The sacrament in which we believe that all sin (most importantly, original sin) is washed away and we are born again as members of God's family.

Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. John 3:5

- Penance: The sacrament in which we believe that Christ, through the priest, forgives our sins and restores us to a life of grace.

Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. John 20:22-23

- The Eucharist: The sacrament in which we believe that Christ's true body and blood, under the appearance of bread and wine, is consecrated by the priest and consumed by the people.

And whilst they were eating, Jesus took bread; and blessing, broke, and gave to them, and said: Take ye. This is my body. And having taken the chalice, giving thanks, he gave it to them. And they all drank of it. And he said to them: This is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many. Mark 14:22-24

- Confirmation: The sacrament in which we believe that the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are poured out, allowing the participants to become soldiers of Christ.

Now when the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost.... Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. Acts 8:14-17.

- Marriage: The sacrament in which we believe God joins a man and a woman together in sacramental marriage, with a bond that cannot be broken until death do they part.

For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh. Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Matt. 19:5-6

- Holy Orders: The sacrament in which we believe that a man is empowered by the Holy Spirit as a priest of God, now able to administer the sacraments.

For every high priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins.... Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was Heb. 5:1-4

- Extreme Unction (or Anointing of the Sick): The sacrament in which we believe the sick are strengthened and the dying are blessed and readied for eternal life.

Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord . . . and if he be sin, they shall be forgiven him. James 5:14-15

What does tradition say? Ok, so Biblical evidence is now supporting our belief in the sacraments. But why seven? What is the significance of the number seven in pertaining to the sacraments?

The Latin word for an oath is "sacramentum." The Hebrew word for oath is "Shevah," which is translated: "to seven oneself." So Christ establishes seven renewing covenants in His Catholic Church.

What is this about covenants and oaths? An oath and covenant is an agreement with God, in which we invoke His name. When we start out the Mass, we began, "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." When we call upon God to bless and accept this sacrifice in the Eucharist, we invoke His name. We also respond with "Amen" when the priest says, "The body (or blood) of Christ."

Christ didn't just give us bits and pieces of His sacrifice on the cross. He gave it all to us, and continues to give His all to us through the sacraments.

What does the Catholic Church say? The Catholic Church defines a sacrament in the Catechism as: "The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions." (CCC, 81131)

St. Augustine says, "The visible sacrifice is the sacrament of the invisible sacrifice." Thus, the Catholic Church's stance on the sacraments is that there are seven sacraments, given to us by Christ, and brought to us by the Church. The Sacraments have the ability to give us grace when validly given and validly received, and their validity is completely independent of the one administering the Sacrament. Three of the sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, produce an indelible mark on the soul.

In Conclusion: In answer to the question: "Why do Catholics have seven Sacraments?" One may say this: Catholicism has the belief that, by following the Bible, tradition, and the guidance of the Catholic Church, there are seven sacraments instituted by Christ to give us grace. Each sacrament has biblical evidence and tradition backing its actions. The seven refers from the Hebrew word Shevah, meaning an oath, or to seven oneself, as the Sacraments are covenants in which we invoke God's name.

Blessings! ++ Archbishop David S. Moody, D.D., Th.D.