

Why are the sacraments significant for a Catholic?

Lauren: Hello and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast. I'm a journalist, broadcaster and your host Lauren Layfield. In this series we'll be going over the key beliefs and practices for your GCSE on Catholic Christianity. And in this episode, we're finding out about the key Catholic Christian sacraments and why they are significant.

And I'm here with the brilliant broadcaster, author and teacher, Bobby Seagull. Hi Bobby!

Bobby: Hi Lauren! Thank you for inviting me - I am really excited about explaining the Sacraments and sharing their significance, as they are a big part of my life as a Catholic. They've marked some huge moments in my life: like when I got Baptised or when I received the Eucharist for the first time.

Even though I was baptised as a baby and don't remember it, I've seen the photos and heard the stories - and knowing that was the starting point of my faith journey really matters to me. But I definitely remember my first Holy Communion and Eucharist - and what a celebration afterwards!

Lauren: We'll be exploring moments like these, and more, later. If you've got a pen and paper, or notes app on your phone, get them ready for some quick notes as we go.

Bobby: At the end, we'll have a short quiz to help you check what you remember.

Lauren: Don't forget you can find a full range of podcasts covering loads of GCSE subjects like History as well as Religious Studies - download the Sounds app and search for Bitesize GCSE.

Bobby: Right, let's get started!

Lauren: To start with Bobby, can you define what a sacrament is?

Bobby: For most Catholic Christians, a sacrament is a very significant ritual that demonstrates and builds faith. It's a very special and symbolic way to show God's grace.

Lauren: What do you mean by God's grace?

Bobby: We believe God's Grace reminds Catholics that God is all powerful and all loving - that His love is unconditional no matter what.

Lauren: Thank you. Tell us more about these sacraments.

Bobby: Catholic Christianity teaches the belief that the love and gifts of God are given through seven sacraments.

Lauren: It sounds like sacraments have huge meaning for many Catholics.

Bobby: Absolutely. I see each sacrament as a living encounter with God.

Lauren: Do all Catholic Christians receive all sacraments?

Bobby: No, most receive six of the seven sacraments at least once at some point in their life.

Let me read this quote to you from the Catechism - an official summary of beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church - paragraph 12-10 which refers to the sacraments:

"The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life."

Lauren: 'They' in that reading means the sacraments. It sounds like this is a really big part of Catholic Christian life. Let's go through each of the sacraments.

Bobby: Ok. There are seven sacraments and they all help Christians grow closer to God. Baptism welcomes a person into God's family, confirmation gives strength from the Holy Spirit, and the Eucharist helps people remember Jesus and feel close to Him.

Lauren: That's three. What about the other four?

Bobby: Penance is when Catholics confess their sins and receive God's forgiveness.

Anointing of the Sick asks God to bring comfort, strength, and healing.

Marriage is when two people promise to love each other with God's blessing and is a lifelong commitment.

Holy Orders is when someone is ordained as a deacon, priest, or bishop to serve the Church. Only a few people receive this sacrament.

Lauren: Let's look at three in detail: baptism, marriage, and Eucharist. Don't forget - there's more to learn on sacraments on the Bitesize website. Just search 'Bitesize GCSE religious studies, Catholic sacraments'

Lauren: What you're hearing there is the sound from the service of baptism - the first sacrament a Catholic Christian receives in the Catholic Church.

Bobby: Baptism is the beginning of a Catholic's journey and I think it's such a positive sacrament. And that's because baptism opens the door for Catholic Christians, as you can't receive any other sacraments without being baptised.

Lauren: What happens in a baptism ceremony?

Bobby: In the Catholic Church, baptism is usually received by infants. The priest makes the sign of the cross, anoints the child with oil, and pours water over their head three times.

Lauren: And why is baptism significant?

Bobby: Catholicism teaches the belief that baptism not only embraces a new member of the Catholic Christian family into the arms of the Church but erases original and personal sin.

Lauren: Let's move on to the next sacrament - marriage. Many people see marriage as a significant commitment. What does it mean for Catholics in particular?

Bobby: Catholic Christianity teaches that the sacrament of marriage is a visible pledge of total commitment and lifelong dedication between husband and wife. The Catechism says that the marriage bond between two baptized people is established "by God himself."

Lauren: So even the Church can't intervene once a couple is married?

Bobby: That's what we believe, yes. That's why you hear the phrase, "What God has joined together, let no one separate" during the wedding ceremony. It comes from the book of Matthew, chapter 19 verse 6.

Lauren: That's an excellent summing up. Let's look at another really significant sacrament: the Eucharist. Shall we spell that word?

Bobby: Yep. E-U-C-H-A-R-I-S-T. Take a listen to this hymn.

Bobby: That hymn is often sung around the moment of consecration, when the priest prays over the bread and wine. He then lifts up the consecrated host for the congregation to see. The Eucharist is a thanksgiving for Jesus' sacrifice in giving His life on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Catholics believe that through Jesus, He becomes truly present in the bread and wine.

Lauren: And what's the significance of the bread and wine?

Bobby: Four books within the New Testament of the Bible talk about a powerful moment when Jesus shared one last meal - the Last Supper - with His disciples (a group of loyal followers) the night before He died. Jesus began the Eucharist at the

Last Supper. He specifically instructed His disciples to share the bread and wine in memory of him.

Lauren: And there's a significant line from the Gospels - the teachings of the disciples - isn't there?

Bobby: Yes - Jesus' disciple Matthew says: "While they were eating, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take it; this is my body...' Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood".

Lauren: Jesus taught that the Eucharist should also take place to remember him.

Bobby: That's right. In the Book of Luke chapter 22 verse 19 from the Bible, it says: "Do this in remembrance of me". Scripture teaches Catholic Christians that the bread and wine of the Eucharist transform into the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ. This belief is known as transubstantiation.

Lauren: Transubstantiation - that's a significant word.

Bobby: It is. Eucharist - which we also call Holy Communion - is administered during Mass. It is during this holy sacrament that Catholics believe transubstantiation takes place.

Lauren: Why is the Eucharist significant to you as a Catholic?

Bobby: The Eucharist allows me to be one with God and unite with other Catholic Christians who also receive Eucharist. No matter how busy life gets, that moment at Mass resets me. It's the pinnacle of my faith.

Of all the sacraments, it's also the one received most frequently (usually weekly). This is why the Eucharist holds a special and central place among the sacraments.

Lauren: Thanks so much for explaining that

Lauren: It's time for a quick quiz. Bobby come on - you can test me!

Bobby: Alright Lauren, this is a quick-fire recap. You ready?

Lauren: Let's do it.

Bobby: What is a sacrament?

Lauren: A sacrament is an outward sign of God's grace. It's a physical reminder that God is all powerful and all loving

Bobby: Yes! Well remembered. Which sacrament is a thanksgiving for Jesus' sacrifice in giving His life on the cross for the sins of humans?

Lauren: The Eucharist. And remember it is the Catholic Christian belief that the bread and wine of the Eucharist literally becomes Jesus' body and blood. This is known as transubstantiation.

Bobby: Perfect. And which quote from the Catechism, paragraph 12-10 explains why Catholics have seven sacraments?

Lauren: It's this - "The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life."

Bobby: Brilliant! All Correct

Lauren: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast.

Bobby: In the next episode we'll look at how worship and festivals shape the Catholic Christian faith.

Lauren: And don't forget there are loads of podcasts to help you with your GCSEs, just search for Bitesize GCSE on BBC Sounds. See you next time!