

## Outward sign / Inward grace

The outward sign of the Mass is the bread and wine, offered to God in faith, prayer, and with the words of Jesus himself, who told us to eat and drink his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Where possible the Church has wanted to use unleavened bread in the Eucharist, not least as a link to what Jesus probably did at the Last Supper. Since the time of the early church priests have worn sacred vestments to emphasise the sacred character of what is happening.

As the bread and wine are transformed into Christ's body and blood, the most sacred things in all creation are given to us in order that we ourselves might be transformed from being enemies of God through our sins into children of God by his grace. This transformation which God works within us through Jesus' sacrifice is the highest gift of love, for which we give thanks and praise and which we seek to share with others.

## Development and history

The Mass was instituted by Christ himself at the Last Supper the night before he died. Ever since the night of the first Passover, when through the sacrifice of a lamb the people of God were spared death and brought out to freedom in the promised land, the Jews had commemorated this event annually with the sacrifice of the lamb. At the Last Supper the disciples had gathered to celebrate this event, however, that night Jesus identified himself as the lamb of a New Passover who would be sacrificed on the cross to take away the sins of the whole world, redeem his people from the curse of death, and open the way to the promised land of heaven itself. This is the heart of the gospel message, and today the Church has celebrated this sacrificial meal in the knowledge that Christ's promise of salvation is enfolded in this sacred act.

# What is a Sacrament?

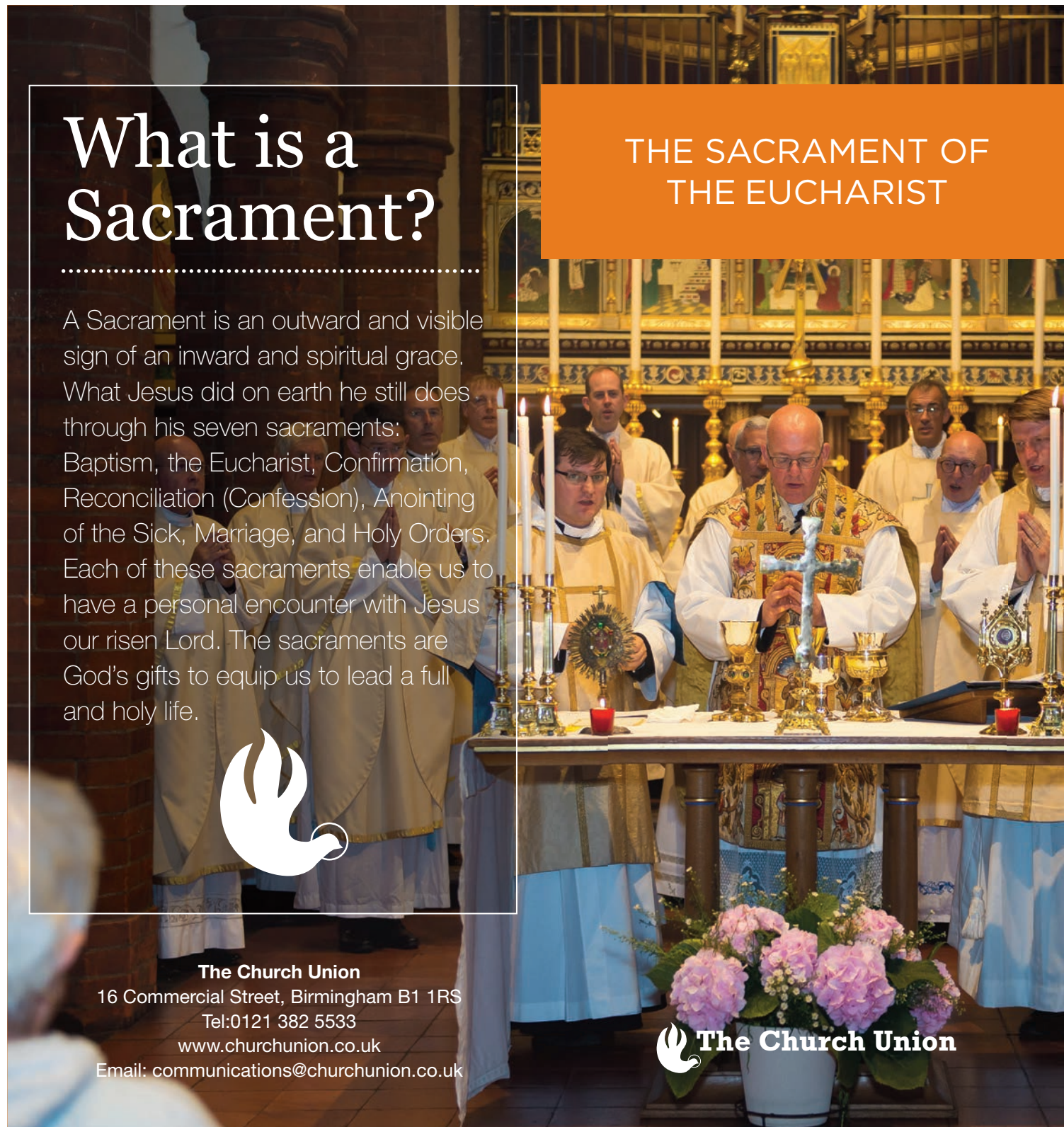
A Sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. What Jesus did on earth he still does through his seven sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation (Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Marriage, and Holy Orders. Each of these sacraments enable us to have a personal encounter with Jesus our risen Lord. The sacraments are God's gifts to equip us to lead a full and holy life.



## THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

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 **The Church Union**





## What can I do next?

Find a church that offers Mass regularly and emphasises its central importance. Going to Mass and participating in it with heart, mind and body is the supreme act of Christian worship. We should attend Mass at least every Sunday and also on the great feast days of the Church.

## Prayer

I believe, O Crucified Lord, that the bread which we break in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries is the Communication of Thy Body, and the cup of blessing which we bless, is the Communication of Thy Blood, and that Thou dost as effectually and really convey Thy Body and Blood to our souls by the bread and wine, as Thou didst Thy Holy Spirit by Thy Breath to Thy disciples; for which all Love, all Glory be to Thee. Amen.

*(Thomas Ken, Anglican Priest 1637 – 1711)*

## What is the Mass?

The Mass, the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, is the sacrament through which we receive the body and blood of Christ. Jesus established this sacrament in order that the benefits of his sacrifice on the cross might be made available to all people, in all places, through all time, until he comes again. It is especially through the Mass that the salvation Christ won for us on the cross can be made ours personally through our participation in it. In this way, the Mass brings us into an intimate relationship ('communion') with Jesus and all faithful Christians, binding us together as one around our Saviour, changing our hearts and minds that we might become more and more Christlike. As Jesus said, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

## What the Church says

The Church teaches that the Mass is "the source and summit of the Christian life." It is the source because it is centred on the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood on the cross, through which our sins are forgiven. It is the summit because there is no greater gift or higher honour than his invitation to participate in that sacrifice, because it is entirely undeserved.



*'The Mass is the 'means through which the atoning work of Christ on the cross is proclaimed and made effective in the life of the church ... the church continues to make a perpetual memorial of Christ's death, and his members, united with God and one another, give thanks for all his mercies, entreat the benefits of his passion on behalf of the whole church, participate in these benefits and enter into the movement of his self-offering.'*

*(ARCIC Agreed Statement on the Eucharist 1971)*

## What a Theologian says

*"When you see the bread broken, remember how his blessed body was torn with nails upon the cross; when you see the wine poured out, remember how his precious blood was spilt there; and then consider how it was your sins that caused both... And since he gives his Son in the sacrament, he gives with him all the benefits of the New Covenant: pardon for sins, sanctifying grace, and a title to an eternal inheritance. And here be astonished at the infinite goodness of God, who reaches out to you with so precious a treasure."* *(Richard Allestree - an Anglican priest 1621-81).*

## What the Bible says

*Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever."* John 6:53-58