THE DAILY BREAD

The Creed of the Apostles



The Sacraments

Each One, Fully

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

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The Sacraments

Seven Encounters With the Living God

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A Daily Bread Formation Book

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INTRODUCTION

Seven Doors a Man Walks Through Half-Asleep

A Catholic man will, in the course of an ordinary life, walk through most of the seven sacraments, and he will walk through many of them half-asleep. He was baptized before he can remember. He was confirmed as a boy who wanted it over with. He receives Communion most Sundays with his mind on the parking lot. He goes to Confession, when he goes, with a kind of dutiful dread. He was married in a church in a ceremony he recalls mostly as a blur of logistics. And one day he will be anointed, perhaps too late, by a priest he did not think to call sooner. Seven encounters with the living God, and a man can pass through them all scarcely awake to what is happening.

This book is an attempt to wake him up. The sacraments are often spoken of together, as seven channels of grace, and that is true as far as it goes. But treated only as a group, they blur, and a man never grasps what is actually, specifically happening in each one. So here we slow down and take them one at a time, each one fully, asking of each the same two questions: what is really happening here, and am I receiving it as though I believe it? The difference between a man who knows the answers and a man who does not is the difference between sleepwalking through the most powerful encounters available to a human being and meeting God, awake, in each of them.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. — John 10:10

For the sacraments are nothing less than the ordinary way the abundant life Christ promised actually reaches a man. They are not symbols that remind him of grace; they are the instruments that deliver it, the places where the risen Christ reaches through the ordinary stuff of water and oil and bread and words and human hands, and touches a particular soul with his own life. To understand them is to stop being a passive recipient of rituals and to become a man who knows what is on offer and comes to get it. And it is the first equipment of a father, for a man who grasps the sacraments becomes the one who can lead his own family to the founts of grace. We begin with what a sacrament is, and then take the seven in turn, giving each its full due.

CHAPTER ONE

What a Sacrament Is

Signs That Do What They Say

Before taking up the seven, a man needs to understand what kind of thing a sacrament is at all, because the modern mind has no category for it and so reduces it to the only category it has: a symbol, a ceremony, a meaningful gesture. That reduction empties the sacraments of everything that matters about them. A sacrament is not merely a sign that points to grace. It is a sign that actually delivers the grace it points to.

An Efficacious Sign

The Church defines a sacrament as an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which the life of God is dispensed to us. The crucial word is efficacious: it effects what it signifies. An ordinary sign only points; a road sign gives you no mileage, a photograph of water cannot quench thirst. A sacrament is different. When the water is poured and the words are spoken in Baptism, the washing it signifies actually happens in the soul; the man is actually cleansed and reborn. The sign does not merely illustrate the grace. It is the instrument through which Christ gives it. This is why a man cannot get the same thing by a private feeling of devotion that he gets in a sacrament. The sacrament is not a symbol of something happening elsewhere in his heart. It is the thing itself happening, through the sign.

Why Matter and Words

Each sacrament works through a physical element and a set of words, what the tradition calls its matter and form, together with a proper minister who intends to do what the Church does. Water and the words of Baptism; bread and wine and the words of consecration; oil, the laying on of hands, the exchange of consent. This use of physical things is not a concession to our weakness but a consequence of the Incarnation. God, having taken a body, continues to reach us through bodies and matter. He does not deal with us as pure spirits but as the embodied creatures we are, and so his grace comes to us clothed in water and oil and bread, things we can see and touch and taste. The sacraments are the extension of the Incarnation through time, the risen Christ still reaching us, as he reached the people of Galilee, through physical contact.

And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. — John 1:16

It Does Not Depend on the Minister

One more truth guards a man from a common anxiety. The grace of a sacrament does not depend on the holiness of the priest who confers it. Because it is Christ himself who acts through the sacrament, a validly celebrated sacrament truly gives grace even when the

minister is a poor or sinful man. The Baptism is valid, the absolution real, the Eucharist truly the Body of Christ, regardless of the private state of the one who ministers, because the power is Christ's and not the priest's. This is an immense mercy, for it means a man's access to grace does not hang on the virtue of the clergy he happens to have. What a man must bring, however, is his own disposition, for while the sacrament always offers the grace, the measure a man actually receives depends on the openness, faith, and repentance he brings to it. The sacrament is never empty. But a man can come to it with his hands closed.

CHAPTER TWO

Born and Sealed

Baptism and Confirmation

The Christian life begins in water and is sealed in oil. The first two sacraments, Baptism and Confirmation, are the sacraments of initiation that bring a man to new birth in Christ and then strengthen and seal that new life for the long work ahead. They are the twin foundations on which the other five are built, and because most men received them so young, most men have never understood what they were given.

Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. — John 3:5

Baptism: The New Birth

Baptism is the doorway to all the rest, the sacrament without which none of the others can be received, and what it accomplishes is nothing less than a new creation. In the waters of Baptism, original sin, the inherited wound that darkens the mind and weakens the will of every son of Adam, is washed entirely away, and for an adult convert every personal sin as well. But Baptism is far more than a cleansing. Into the emptied soul God pours his own divine life, the life called sanctifying grace, so that a man is not merely forgiven but reborn, made a genuine son of God, a living member of the Body of Christ, and a temple in which the Holy Spirit truly dwells. Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom, and he meant it exactly: Baptism is a second birth, as real as the first, by which a creature of earth becomes a child of heaven.

The Indelible Character

Baptism also leaves a permanent mark on the soul, an indelible character that can never be removed or repeated. This is why the Church baptizes a person only once and never again; the seal is eternal and cannot be undone. A man who has fallen away completely, who has not entered a church in decades, who perhaps no longer even believes, is still a baptized man, still marked as belonging to Christ, still carrying the character that claims him. The grace can be lost through grave sin, but the mark remains, a permanent claim on him and a door always standing open for his return. There is great hope in this for a man praying for a wandering son or brother. Whatever he has done, the seal of his Baptism is still on him, and Christ still regards him as his own.

The Covenant and Its Obligations

Baptism is also a covenant, and covenants have two sides. At the font, promises were made, to reject sin and the empty works of the devil and to believe and follow Christ, spoken by the man himself or by his parents and godparents on his behalf. These are not a dead formality from infancy but a standing covenant that defines a man's whole life, renewed every Easter and every time he blesses himself with holy water. To live as a baptized man is to live out those promises as an adult: to actually reject the sin he once renounced in words, to actually follow the Christ he was pledged to. A man who understands his Baptism does not treat his faith as one interest among many. He understands that he was claimed, sealed, and sworn to Another, and that his life is the living out of a covenant made in water.

Confirmation: Sealed and Strengthened

What Baptism begins, Confirmation completes and seals. In Confirmation the Holy Spirit is poured out upon a man in fullness, as the same Spirit came upon the apostles at Pentecost in wind and fire and turned frightened men into fearless witnesses. The sacrament deepens the grace of Baptism, confirms a man in his sonship, and strengthens him for the adult work of living and defending and spreading the faith. It brings an increase of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the dispositions of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, by which a man is made responsive to God's lead and equipped for the battles of a Christian life. Like Baptism, it imprints an indelible character and so is received only once.

Armed for Witness

The old tradition called the confirmed man a soldier of Christ, and the image, unfashionable as it is, is exact. Confirmation is not a graduation from religious childhood, though that is how most men experienced it and then filed it away. It is an arming. The

grace a man received at his Confirmation did not expire when he left his teens; it is in him still, the Spirit's own strengthening given for precisely the trials of faith he now faces as a grown man in a hostile age, the courage to be known as a Catholic at work, to defend the faith to his children, to stand when standing costs something. Most men have a reservoir of grace in them, given and sealed years ago, that they have never once deliberately drawn on. To recover a living sense of one's Confirmation is to remember that one was armed for exactly this.

CHAPTER THREE

The Source and the Summit

The Holy Eucharist

At the center of the seven stands the Eucharist, which the Church calls the source and summit of the whole Christian life, the sacrament toward which all the others are ordered and from which all of them draw their power. If a man grasps and lives only one sacrament fully, let it be this one, for here the faith reaches its height: not a symbol of Christ, not a reminder of him, but Christ himself, truly and substantially present, given to a man to consume.

Take, eat; this is my body… Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant.
— Matthew 26:26-28

The Real Presence

The Church believes, because Christ said it plainly and the Church has held it from the very beginning, that the Eucharist is not bread and wine that symbolize Christ but the true Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, really, truly, and substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine. When Jesus said, this is my body, he did not say this represents my body, and when his hearers recoiled at the hard saying that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood, he did not soften it or call them back to explain that he had spoken only in symbol; he let them walk away rather than take it back. The Church has never taken it back either. On the altar, at the words of consecration, what still looks and tastes like bread is no longer bread at all but the Lord himself. This is either the most important fact in a man's life or an absurdity, and it is not a thing a man can hold politely at arm's length. Christ is there, or he is not.

What Transubstantiation Means

The Church uses a precise word for what happens: transubstantiation. The word rewards understanding, because it guards the mystery exactly. It means that the substance of the bread and wine, what they most deeply are in themselves, is changed into the substance of Christ's Body and Blood, while the appearances, what the tradition calls the accidents, the look, taste, weight, and chemistry of bread and wine, remain unchanged. This is why nothing seems different to the senses, and why faith is required to perceive what has occurred. It is not that Christ is hidden inside the bread, nor that the bread has become a symbol charged with his presence. The bread is gone; its deepest reality has become him, under the lingering appearances of bread and wine. A man kneeling before the Eucharist is kneeling before God as truly as the shepherds knelt at Bethlehem, though now the veil is not the flesh of an infant but the humble form of bread.

The Sacrifice Made Present

The Eucharist is not only the Real Presence to be adored but the sacrifice of Christ made present to be offered. The Mass is not a new sacrifice, as though Christ were killed again, and it is not merely a fond memory of a past event. It is the one sacrifice of Calvary, the single offering Christ made once for all upon the Cross, made present again on the altar, so that a man at Mass is not recalling Calvary from a distance but standing, mystically, at its very foot. The same offering, the same Priest, the same Victim, re-presented now in an unbloody manner, so that the infinite power of the Cross is applied here and now to the people in the pews. This is why the Mass is the most powerful prayer on earth, and why no devotion, however beautiful, can substitute for it. When a man assists at Mass, he is present at the one act that redeemed the world, and he may unite his own small offerings, his work, his sufferings, his family, to the offering of Christ himself.

Receiving as If You Believe

All of this bears directly on how a man approaches the altar. If the Eucharist is truly Christ, then to receive him worthily is a matter of the greatest seriousness, and to receive him carelessly is a tragedy. Saint Paul warned that whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the Body and Blood of the Lord, and told each man to examine himself first. This means a man must receive Communion in the state of grace, never with an unconfessed mortal sin on his soul, for to bring spiritual death into the presence of the Author of life is a grave wrong and not a mere technicality. It means the hour's fast before Communion, the reverence of the body, the gathering of the wandering mind. And it means, above all, faith: that a man approaching the altar would come, if he truly believed, with the awe of one approaching the living God, because that is precisely what he is doing. The reform most men need is not to receive more often, but to receive awake.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Two Sacraments of Healing

Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick

Two of the seven are given to a wounded and dying race, to heal the soul of sin and to strengthen soul and body in sickness. Christ, who spent so much of his earthly ministry forgiving and healing, did not stop when he ascended; he left these two sacraments so that his forgiveness and his healing would continue to reach men in every age. They are the medicine of the divine Physician, and a man and his family will need both.

Reconciliation: Christ's Gift of Absolution

On the very evening of his resurrection, before almost anything else, the risen Christ gave his Church the power to forgive sins. He appeared to the apostles, breathed on them, and said: receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. From that night the Church has exercised this astonishing authority to absolve sins in the name of Christ, and she does it in the sacrament of Reconciliation, which men also call Confession or Penance. This is the sacrament by which the sins a man commits after Baptism are truly forgiven and the life of grace, if it has been lost, is restored to his soul. It is the ordinary and God-given way that a mortal sin is wiped away; there is no substitute a man can arrange for himself, no private sorrow that replaces the absolution Christ chose to give through his priests.

The Raising of the Dead

What happens in that confessional is nothing less than a raising of the dead. A man walks in carrying real guilt, perhaps carrying the spiritual death of a soul that has driven out the life of God by grave sin, and through the words of absolution Christ himself, acting through the priest, forgives him, restores the divine life, and sends him out clean. This is why Confession is not a counseling session, not a psychological exercise, not a quaint custom to be endured, but one of the most powerful things that can happen to a human being. A man ought to run to it, not from dread but from understanding, because he knows exactly what is given back. And he ought to go regularly, not only in the rare event of a grave fall, but as the steady cleansing and strengthening of a soul, for Confession not only restores lost grace but, received often, deepens a man’s self-knowledge, curbs his habitual faults, and guards him against the slow drift toward serious sin.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil… And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick.
— James 5:14-15

How to Make a Good Confession

Making a good confession has a simple and ancient shape, five acts that turn a nervous mumble into a genuine encounter. First, a man examines his conscience, honestly reviewing his sins since his last confession. Second, he is truly contrite, sorry for having sinned, and it is worth knowing that even imperfect sorrow, sorrow arising partly from the fear of hell or the ugliness of sin rather than from pure love of God, is enough for a valid confession, for the sacrament itself perfects what a man brings. Third, he forms a firm purpose of amendment, a real resolve to turn from the sin and from the occasions that lead to it. Fourth, he confesses his sins to the priest, simply and completely, naming the serious ones in kind and number as best he can, without excuses and without performance. Fifth, he accepts and carries out the penance given, the small act of satisfaction that begins to repair the damage. These five are not red tape; they are the very shape of genuine repentance, the difference between truly turning back to God and merely venting one's regret.

Anointing Is Not Only for the Dying

The second sacrament of healing, the Anointing of the Sick, is the most misunderstood the Church possesses, and the misunderstanding does real harm. Many men know it only by its old name, last rites, and so imagine it is reserved for the final hours, a ritual to be summoned when death is certain and near. This is why so many Catholics receive it far too late, or not at all, the priest called when the man is already unconscious or gone. But the Church teaches clearly that this sacrament is for anyone seriously weakened by illness or old age, and that the right time to receive it is at the onset of a grave illness, before a serious surgery, or in the real frailty of age, and not only at the edge of the grave. It can be received again whenever a man enters a new serious illness. A man should know this for himself and for his aging parents, and should not let fear or superstition rob him of a grace meant to be received while it can still be consciously known.

What the Anointing Gives

The sacrament gives far more than a gentle farewell. Through the anointing with blessed oil and the prayer of the priest, Christ strengthens the sick person with a particular grace: peace and courage to face the trial of serious illness, the uniting of the man's own suffering to the suffering of Christ so that it becomes redemptive rather than merely

wasted pain, the forgiveness of his sins when he is no longer able to confess them, and, when God wills it, even the restoration of bodily health. It turns a sickbed from a place of fear and futility into a place of grace, where a man is joined to the Cross and prepared, if his time has come, for the passage home. Far from being morbid, it is among the tenderest things the Church does, Christ himself drawing near to a man at his very weakest. A family that understands this will call the priest early, and let the gravely ill meet Christ in the sacrament while there is still time to know that he has come.

CHAPTER FIVE

Men Set Apart

Holy Orders

Two of the seven sacraments are given not chiefly for the sanctification of the one who receives them but for the service of others, and the Church calls them sacraments at the service of communion. The first is Holy Orders, by which certain men are set apart and configured to Christ to serve the whole Body as its ordained ministers. Every man benefits from this sacrament whether or not he receives it, for without it there would be no Eucharist, no absolution, no Church as Christ actually built her.

Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. — Hebrews 5:1

Configured to Christ the Head

In Holy Orders, through the laying on of the bishop's hands and the prayer of consecration, a man is given a share in the priesthood of Christ himself and configured to Christ as Head and Shepherd of his Church. Like Baptism and Confirmation, the sacrament imprints an indelible character on the soul, so that a man is a priest forever; ordination, once valid, can never be undone, even if a man leaves active ministry or falls into disgrace. The sacrament comes in three grades. The bishop holds its fullness, succeeding the apostles and carrying the authority to teach, govern, and ordain. The priest serves as the bishop's co-worker, offering the Eucharist, absolving sins, and shepherding the people in the parishes. And the deacon is ordained for service, assisting at the altar, proclaiming and preaching the word, and leading the Church's works of charity. Christ instituted this priesthood at the Last Supper, when, having given the apostles his Body and Blood, he commanded them, do this in remembrance of me, handing them both the Eucharist and the power to confect it.

The Priest as Another Christ

The heart of the ordained priesthood is this: when a priest acts in the sacraments, he acts in the very person of Christ. It is not the priest's own power that changes the bread into the Body of Christ or forgives a man's sins; it is Christ acting through him, so completely that at the altar the priest does not say this is the Body of Christ but this is my body, speaking in the person of the Lord himself. The tradition calls the priest another Christ, alter Christus, not because he is personally holier than other men, for often enough he is not, but because he has been given to stand in Christ's place at the altar and in the confessional, to do there what only Christ can do. This is why a man should reverence the priesthood even when a particular priest disappoints or fails him. He is not reverencing the man but the Christ who acts through him, the gift by which the risen Lord keeps feeding and forgiving his people through the hands of ordinary, fallible men set apart for the task. And it is why a man should pray for priests, and encourage the call where he sees it in his sons, for without these set-apart men the whole sacramental life of the Church would stop.

CHAPTER SIX

Two Become One

Matrimony

The second sacrament at the service of communion is one most of the men reading this have already received, often without grasping that in it they were handling something holy. Christian marriage is not merely a contract, a legal arrangement, or a romantic milestone that the Church agrees to bless. It is a sacrament, through which a man and a woman receive the grace of Christ to love each other as he loves, and become, in their very union, a living sign of his love for the Church.

The two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. — Ephesians 5:31-32

The Spouses Are the Ministers

A striking feature sets this sacrament apart from the others: the priest is not its minister. In Matrimony the spouses themselves are the ministers, conferring the sacrament on each other by their free exchange of consent, with the priest and the Church present as the official witnesses. When a man and a woman freely give and receive each other in their vows, they are not merely making promises in front of God; they are making a

sacrament, opening a channel of grace, and Christ binds himself from that day forward to supply them what they will need to live what they have promised. This is why a man should see his own marriage as a wellspring of grace he has very likely underused. The patience, the fidelity, the sacrificial love that marriage demands are not finally his to manufacture by willpower; the sacrament itself is the standing source of the grace to live them, grace he can draw on every single day simply by turning to it and asking.

The Three Goods of Marriage

The tradition names three goods that marriage exists to serve, and a man does well to know them, because they are the measure of what he actually vowed. The first is children: marriage is ordered by its very nature to the bringing forth and raising of new life, and an openness to children is written into the meaning of the union itself, not added onto it as an optional extra. The second is fidelity: the exclusive and total faithfulness of the spouses to each other in body and in heart, a faithfulness an age of casual betrayal has all but forgotten how to honor. And the third is permanence: the lifelong bond that does not end until death parts the spouses. These three, children, fidelity, and permanence, are not arbitrary rules imposed on marriage from outside; they are the shape of the thing itself, the goods a man promised to serve on his wedding day, whether or not anyone ever explained to him that this was what he was promising.

What God Has Joined

The permanence of marriage deserves a direct word, because the surrounding culture has so completely abandoned it. The Church teaches, because Christ himself taught it plainly, that a valid, consummated, sacramental marriage cannot be dissolved by any power on earth; what God has joined together, he said, let no man separate. This is not cruelty but mercy and hard realism, the protection of the one human bond on which children and society most depend from the destructive instability of passing feeling. A man should hear this not as a threat held over him but as a strength given to him: his marriage rests on something far sturdier than his moods or his wife's, a bond that God himself holds together and that does not depend on the spouses always feeling in love. This teaching is genuinely hard for those whose marriages have broken, and the Church does not meet such men and women with contempt but with care. Where a true marriage never validly came into being in the first place, she can declare so through what is called an annulment, which is not a Catholic divorce but an honest finding about whether a real sacramental bond ever existed. But the teaching itself stands as a gift and a high calling: that marriage is meant to be, and by the grace of this sacrament truly can be, until death.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Sacramental Life

Leading Your Family to the Founts of Grace

Knowing what the sacraments are is the beginning; living by them is the point, and leading others to them is the mission. A man who has grasped the seven does not merely receive them more reverently himself, though he does. He becomes what the Church most needs him to be, the one who leads his own household to the founts of grace, the priest of the domestic church.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. — Joshua 24:15

Build Your Life on the Sacraments

The first application is to a man's own life, and it is simply this: order your life around the sacraments, because they are where the grace actually is. A man can read every spiritual book, attend every conference, and follow every devotion, and still slowly run dry, because those are not the channels Christ established; the sacraments are. So the serious Christian builds his week and his life around them. He goes to Mass not only on Sunday but, if he is able, more often, and he receives the Eucharist awake and in the state of grace. He goes to Confession regularly, not only when he has fallen gravely but as the steady maintenance of his soul. If he is married, he draws deliberately on the grace of his marriage; if he falls ill, he knows to seek the Anointing in good time. He treats the sacraments not as occasional religious observances to be fitted around his real life, but as the regular meals of the soul, without which he will quietly starve no matter how active his religion otherwise appears.

Lead Your Household

The second application is to a man's family, and here he steps fully into his calling as the spiritual head of his home. He is the one most responsible, under God, for whether his children grow up actually meeting Christ in the sacraments or merely going through empty motions. He sees that they are baptized, and prepared well and seriously for their First Communion and their Confirmation, not as social rituals or family milestones but as the real encounters with God that they are. He gets his family to Mass, and teaches them, more by his own visible reverence than by any lecture, what is truly happening there. He brings them to Confession, and lets them see him go himself. He builds a home in which the sacraments are central and honored, and when sickness comes, he knows to call the priest early. No one else can do this for his household as a father can. The parish assists

him, but the father leads, and children learn the real worth of the sacraments first and most lastingly from a father who plainly treats them as the most important things in his own life.

The Bridge to Mission

And this is where the sacramental man becomes the apostolic one. The Mission of the Apostles will send a man out to bring others to Christ, and the sacraments are both the power that fuels him and the destination to which he leads. He cannot give what he has not got; it is the grace of the Eucharist and of Confession that will sustain him in the work, and it is to these same founts that he must bring the people he reaches, because no conversion is complete until a soul is actually drinking at the sacraments. A man formed in the sacraments is therefore equipped for mission at the deepest level: fed by grace himself, and able to lead others to the place where grace is given. First, though, one last station stands before the sending, the one that gives the whole of it its weight and urgency: the Last Things, and how a man is to die.

CONCLUSION

Wake Up at the Doors

Return to the man walking half-asleep through the seven sacraments, and see now how much he was sleeping through. In Baptism he was reborn, cleansed, filled with the life of God, and sealed forever as a son. In Confirmation he was flooded with the Holy Spirit and armed with the gifts for the very battles he now fights as a man. In the Eucharist, week after week, the living God gives himself into his hands and onto his tongue, and the sacrifice of Calvary is made present before his eyes. In Confession the dead are raised and the lost life restored. In the Anointing Christ draws near in sickness to strengthen, to forgive, and to save. In Holy Orders he is given priests who stand in Christ's own place to feed and forgive him. And in Matrimony, if he is married, he was made a living sign of Christ's love for the Church and given the grace to love his wife as Christ loves. Seven encounters with the living God, and most men barely awake to any of them.

This whole book has been one long attempt to wake a man at the doors. The sacraments are not religious formalities to be endured; they are the ordinary means by which the risen Christ reaches through matter and human hands to touch a particular soul with his own divine life, the most powerful and most available encounters with God on the face of the earth. To receive them awake, in faith and in the state of grace, is to live an entirely

different kind of life than the man who receives them asleep, for the grace is truly offered either way, but only the awake man opens his hands to take it.

Wake up at the doors, then, and lead your household through them awake. Build your life on the sacraments, drink deeply at them, and bring your family and, soon, the world to the founts where grace is actually given. There remains only one thing now to set before you, the thing that makes every sacrament and every choice matter forever: the Last Things, and the art of dying well. That is the final station, and the gateway to the mission.

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The Sacraments: Seven Encounters With the Living God is part of The Daily Bread Library.