THE DAILY BREAD

*The Magnificat of the Beloved*



# Each One, Fully

*The Seven Sacraments*

A FORMATION BOOK BY

**Kendall Peterson**

*The Everyday Apostle*

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*Magnificat of the Beloved*

# Each One, Fully

## The Seven Sacraments

*Seven Encounters, Each One Unrepeatable*

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*A Daily Bread Formation Book*

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INTRODUCTION

# What a Sacrament Really Is

A woman may have received the sacraments all her life, been baptized as an infant, confirmed as a girl, receiving the Eucharist week after week, confessing her sins in the dark of the confessional, and still not quite know what is happening in them, what a sacrament actually is and does. She may receive them faithfully and yet treat them as rituals the Church performs rather than encounters in which God acts, so that the sacraments, which are the primary means by which God delivers His grace into her life, become routine rather than the unrepeatable, transforming encounters they are. To receive the sacraments as what they are, a woman must first understand what a sacrament really is, and then understand each one individually, what each does and what grace each confers.

This book treats the seven sacraments one at a time, each one fully, slowing down to look at what is actually happening in each. It will first explain what a sacrament is, an efficacious sign of grace instituted by Christ, and then take each sacrament in turn: Baptism, the new birth; Confirmation, the sealing and sending; the Eucharist, the Real Presence; Reconciliation, the restoring; Anointing of the Sick, the healing; Holy Orders, the priesthood she depends on; and Matrimony, the covenant of grace. The aim is to give a woman the theological depth that transforms her sacramental life from routine into encounter, so that she receives each sacrament knowing what it is and believing what it does.

*From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. — John 1:16*

A sacrament is an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The word efficacious is the key: a sacrament does not merely point to grace or symbolize it but actually confers it, truly effecting what it signifies, so that in each sacrament Christ Himself acts, pouring His grace into the soul through the visible sign. Every sacrament has its matter and its form, its proper minister, the right intention, and its effect, the specific grace it gives, and this book will treat each of the seven in its particularity. From the fullness of Christ a woman receives, in the sacraments, grace upon grace, and this book will help her understand each one so that she may receive them fully, as the real encounters with the living God that they are.

CHAPTER ONE

# Baptism

### *The New Birth*

Baptism is the first of the sacraments, the gateway to all the others, the sacrament of rebirth by which a woman is made a new creature, freed from sin, and born into the life of God. Understanding Baptism, what it does and the covenant it establishes, reveals the foundation of a woman's whole Christian life, the new birth from which everything else proceeds.

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that we too might walk in newness of life. — Romans 6:4*

## Rebirth and New Creation

Baptism is a true rebirth, a dying and rising with Christ by which a woman is made a new creation, cleansed of original sin and born into the divine life. In Baptism a woman is not merely washed symbolically but genuinely reborn, for she is buried with Christ into His death and raised with Him to new life, so that the old self, bound by original sin, dies, and a new self is born, a new creation sharing in the very life of God, her sins forgiven, her soul cleansed, and she herself made a child of God. This means Baptism effects a radical transformation, not a mere ceremony marking entry into the Church but a true rebirth by which a woman is made genuinely new, dead to sin and alive to God, the whole of her Christian life proceeding from this new birth. The woman who understands Baptism as rebirth sees herself as a new creation, born into God's life and cleansed of sin. Rebirth and new creation is what Baptism effects, a woman buried with Christ and raised to new life, cleansed of original sin and born into the divine life.

## The Indwelling of the Trinity

In Baptism the Holy Trinity comes to dwell within a woman, so that God Himself takes up residence in her soul, making her a living temple of His presence. Baptism confers not only cleansing from sin but the indwelling of the Holy Trinity, for when a woman is baptized, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come to dwell within her soul by grace, making her a temple of the living God, so that she carries within her the very presence of God, no longer separated from Him but inhabited by Him, the Trinity dwelling in the sanctuary of her baptized soul. This means a woman's Baptism makes her a dwelling place of God, her soul a temple where the Trinity abides, so that she bears God within her from the moment of her Baptism, a presence that remains as long as she lives in grace. The woman who understands the indwelling of the Trinity knows she carries God within her, her

baptized soul His temple. The indwelling of the Trinity is conferred in Baptism, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit coming to dwell within a woman's soul, making her a living temple of God's presence.

### The Baptismal Covenant

Baptism establishes a covenant with ongoing obligations, for a woman baptized is not only given grace but bound to Christ in a covenant she is called to live out her whole life. Baptism is the establishing of a covenant, a sacred bond between the baptized woman and God, in which she renounces sin and Satan and professes her faith, receiving in return the grace of divine life, so that Baptism is not a one-time event with no further claim but the beginning of a covenant relationship carrying ongoing obligations, the baptismal promises to reject sin and live for God to be renewed and lived throughout her life. This means a woman's Baptism commits her to a way of life, the baptismal covenant obliging her to live out her renunciation of sin and her profession of faith, so that she understands her Baptism not as a past event but as a living covenant shaping how she lives now. The woman who understands the baptismal covenant lives out her baptismal promises, her whole life a working-out of the covenant Baptism began. The baptismal covenant is established in Baptism, a sacred bond carrying ongoing obligations, so that a woman lives out her renunciation of sin and profession of faith throughout her life.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Confirmation

### *Sealed and Sent*

Confirmation completes the grace of Baptism, sealing a woman with the Holy Spirit and equipping her with His gifts for the mission to which she is sent, so that she is strengthened as a witness and an apostle. Understanding Confirmation, its sealing and its sending, reveals how a woman is equipped and commissioned for her apostolic life.

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. — Ephesians 1:13*

### The Completion of Baptismal Grace

Confirmation completes and perfects the grace begun in Baptism, bringing to fullness the gift of the Holy Spirit that Baptism first conferred. Confirmation is not a separate and unrelated grace but the completion of baptismal grace, for it perfects and brings to

fullness the gift of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism, strengthening and deepening the divine life begun there, so that the woman confirmed is rooted more deeply in her baptismal identity, her share in the life of God confirmed and brought toward its completion through this sacrament. This means Confirmation builds on and completes Baptism rather than standing alone, perfecting the grace a woman first received at the font, so that she understands her Confirmation as the fulfillment and strengthening of her baptismal life, not a new beginning but the maturing of what Baptism began. The woman who understands Confirmation as the completion of baptismal grace sees it strengthening and perfecting the divine life begun at her Baptism. The completion of baptismal grace is what Confirmation effects, perfecting and bringing to fullness the gift of the Holy Spirit first conferred in Baptism.

## Sealed with the Spirit

In Confirmation a woman is sealed with the Holy Spirit, marked permanently as belonging to Christ, so that she bears an indelible spiritual seal that configures her to Him. Confirmation confers a seal, an indelible spiritual mark by which a woman is sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and marked permanently as belonging to Christ, so that like Baptism it imprints a lasting character on her soul, a seal that can never be removed, claiming her for Christ and equipping her as His own, a permanent sign that she belongs to Him and shares in His mission. This means a woman's Confirmation marks her permanently, sealing her with the Spirit and claiming her for Christ in a way that lasts forever, so that she bears throughout her life and into eternity the seal of the Holy Spirit received in this sacrament. The woman who understands she is sealed with the Spirit knows she bears a permanent mark claiming her for Christ. Sealed with the Spirit, a woman in Confirmation is marked permanently as belonging to Christ, bearing an indelible spiritual seal that configures her to Him.

## Equipped for Mission

Confirmation equips a woman for mission, conferring the gifts of the Holy Spirit as spiritual equipment for the apostolic life to which she is sent. Confirmation is a commissioning as well as a completion, for it confers the gifts of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, as equipment for mission, strengthening a woman to profess, defend, and spread the faith, so that she is not only sealed but sent, equipped by the Spirit for the apostolic work of witnessing to Christ in the world. This means a woman's Confirmation sends her on mission, giving her the Spirit's gifts as the equipment she needs to live as an apostle, so that she understands herself as commissioned and equipped, sent into the world to witness to Christ with the strength the Spirit supplies. The woman who understands she is equipped for mission

receives the Spirit's gifts as equipment for her apostolic life. Equipped for mission, a woman in Confirmation receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit as spiritual equipment for the apostolic life to which she is sent.

CHAPTER THREE

# The Eucharist

### *The Real Presence*

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, the sacrament in which Christ Himself, truly and substantially present, gives Himself to a woman as food for her soul. Understanding the Eucharist, the Real Presence, the transformation of the bread and wine, and the sacrifice it makes present, reveals the heart of the sacramental life.

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. — John 6:51*

## The Real Presence

In the Eucharist Christ is truly, really, and substantially present, not symbolically but in reality, His Body and Blood, soul and divinity, given under the appearances of bread and wine. The central truth of the Eucharist is the Real Presence, that Jesus Christ is truly, really, and substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine, not merely symbolized or represented but genuinely present, His Body and Blood, soul and divinity, so that the consecrated host is not a symbol of Christ but Christ Himself, truly present and truly given, the living bread come down from heaven offered as food for the soul. This means a woman receives in the Eucharist not a symbol but her Lord Himself, truly present under the appearance of bread, so that she approaches the sacrament knowing that she receives the real and substantial presence of Christ, not a representation but the living God. The woman who understands the Real Presence receives the Eucharist knowing she receives Christ Himself, truly and substantially present. The Real Presence is the central truth of the Eucharist, Christ truly, really, and substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine, given as food for the soul.

## Transubstantiation

The change by which the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ is called transubstantiation, the whole substance of the bread and wine changed into Christ while the appearances remain. The Church names the mystery of the Eucharistic change

transubstantiation, meaning that at the consecration the whole substance of the bread is changed into the substance of Christ's Body and the whole substance of the wine into His Blood, while the appearances, the look, taste, and texture of bread and wine, remain, so that what seems to be bread is in substance Christ Himself, the reality changed though the appearances are unchanged. This means a woman understands the Eucharistic change as a real and substantial transformation, the bread and wine truly becoming Christ's Body and Blood though they still appear as bread and wine, so that she receives with faith what her senses cannot perceive, trusting the word of Christ over the appearance. The woman who understands transubstantiation receives the Eucharist trusting that the bread has truly become Christ, whatever her senses report. Transubstantiation names the Eucharistic change, the whole substance of the bread and wine changed into the Body and Blood of Christ while the appearances remain.

### The Sacrifice Made Present

The Mass makes present the one sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, so that in the Eucharist a woman is present at Calvary, the saving sacrifice re-presented though not repeated. The Eucharist is not only the Real Presence but the making-present of Christ's sacrifice, for the Mass is the one sacrifice of Calvary made sacramentally present, not a new or separate sacrifice but the same sacrifice of Christ on the Cross re-presented on the altar, so that when a woman attends Mass she is present at the one saving sacrifice, offered again sacramentally for her, the fruits of Calvary made available to her now. This means a woman understands the Mass as the sacrifice of Christ made present, so that she does not attend a mere memorial service but is brought to Calvary itself, present at the one sacrifice that saves, receiving its fruits through her participation. The woman who understands the sacrifice made present knows that at Mass she stands at Calvary, present at the one saving sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice made present is what the Mass effects, the one sacrifice of Christ on the Cross re-presented sacramentally, so that a woman is present at Calvary and receives its saving fruits.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Reconciliation

### *Restored to God*

Reconciliation is the sacrament of God's mercy, the means Christ gave by which a woman's sins are forgiven and she is restored to the grace she has lost, the only ordinary means of restoring grace after mortal sin. Understanding Reconciliation, its power to

forgive and restore, reveals the sacrament of mercy that renews a woman again and again.

*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. — John 20:23*

## The Sacrament That Restores Grace

Reconciliation is the sacrament that restores the grace lost by sin, the only ordinary means by which mortal sin is forgiven and the life of grace restored to the soul. When a woman falls into serious sin, she loses the life of grace in her soul, and Reconciliation is the sacrament Christ gave to restore it, the ordinary means by which mortal sin is forgiven and sanctifying grace restored, so that the soul that has died to grace through serious sin is brought back to life through this sacrament, reconciled to God and restored to the divine life, the mercy of God delivered concretely through the words of absolution. This means a woman understands Reconciliation as the sacrament of restoration, the ordinary and sure means by which her sins are forgiven and the grace lost through sin is given back, so that she turns to it whenever she has fallen, confident of the restoration it brings. The woman who understands the sacrament that restores grace turns to Reconciliation to be forgiven and renewed whenever she has sinned. The sacrament that restores grace is Reconciliation, the only ordinary means by which mortal sin is forgiven and the life of grace restored to the soul.

## The Acts of the Penitent

Reconciliation involves the acts of the penitent, examination, contrition, confession, and the resolve to amend, together with the satisfaction the priest assigns, by which a woman brings her sins to God's mercy. The sacrament of Reconciliation asks certain acts of the penitent, that a woman examine her conscience to know her sins, feel genuine contrition or sorrow for them, confess them honestly to the priest, resolve firmly to amend her life, and perform the satisfaction or penance assigned, so that she brings her sins to God with real sorrow and honest confession, receiving absolution through the priest who acts in the person of Christ. This means a woman approaches Reconciliation with these acts, examining, sorrowing, confessing, resolving, and making satisfaction, so that she receives the sacrament rightly, bringing her sins honestly to the mercy of God and being truly absolved. The woman who understands the acts of the penitent brings her sins to Reconciliation with examination, contrition, honest confession, and firm resolve. The acts of the penitent are what Reconciliation asks, examination, contrition, confession, and the resolve to amend, with the satisfaction assigned, by which a woman brings her sins to God's mercy.

## Why Regular Confession Matters

Regular Confession is not optional for a serious Catholic woman but a vital part of the spiritual life, cleansing venial sin, deepening self-knowledge, and supplying grace for growth in holiness. Though Reconciliation is strictly required only for mortal sin, regular Confession is not optional for the woman serious about holiness, for frequent reception cleanses the lesser sins that accumulate, grows her self-knowledge and humility, strengthens her against temptation, and supplies the grace she needs for continual growth, so that regular Confession is a vital practice of the serious spiritual life, not a bare minimum but a chosen and frequent source of grace. This means a woman serious about her faith makes regular Confession a habit, not waiting only for grave sin but coming frequently to receive the sacrament's cleansing and strengthening grace, so that she grows steadily in holiness through its regular reception. The woman who understands why regular Confession matters makes it a frequent habit, drawing on its grace for continual growth. Why regular Confession matters is that it is not optional for the serious Catholic woman but a vital part of the spiritual life, cleansing venial sin and supplying grace for growth in holiness.

CHAPTER FIVE

# Anointing of the Sick

### *The Sacrament of Healing*

The Anointing of the Sick is a sacrament of healing, not a rite reserved for the dying but a grace given to those who are seriously ill, uniting their suffering to Christ and strengthening them in body and soul. Understanding the Anointing of the Sick, what it is and when to receive it, recovers a sacrament often misunderstood and underused.

*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. — James 5:14-15*

## A Sacrament of Healing, Not Only Last Rites

The Anointing of the Sick is a sacrament of healing meant for the seriously ill, not a rite reserved only for the dying, a grace often misunderstood as mere last rites. Many Catholics misunderstand the Anointing of the Sick as last rites, a sacrament only for those on the point of death, but it is in truth a sacrament of healing meant for anyone who is seriously ill, offered to strengthen and heal the sick in body and soul, so that it should be received not only at death's door but whenever a woman or her loved ones face

serious illness, a grace for the sick rather than only for the dying. This means a woman understands the Anointing of the Sick rightly as a healing sacrament for the seriously ill, not delaying it until the moment of death but receiving it in serious illness, so that she draws on its grace when it is meant to be received rather than waiting too long. The woman who understands it is a sacrament of healing, not only last rites, receives it in serious illness rather than only at death. A sacrament of healing, not only last rites, the Anointing of the Sick is meant for the seriously ill, strengthening and healing them in body and soul.

## The Grace of the Sacrament

The Anointing of the Sick confers a particular grace, uniting a woman's suffering to Christ, strengthening her soul, forgiving her sins, and sometimes restoring bodily health. The grace of the Anointing of the Sick is manifold, for it unites the sufferings of the sick woman to the Passion of Christ, giving them redemptive meaning, strengthens her soul against discouragement and the temptations of illness, forgives her sins if she is unable to confess, and may even restore her bodily health if that is conducive to her salvation, so that the sacrament pours particular grace into her illness, meeting her in body and soul. This means a woman receives in the Anointing of the Sick a grace fitted to her illness, her suffering joined to Christ's and her soul strengthened, so that she faces serious illness not alone but with the particular grace this sacrament supplies. The woman who understands the grace of the sacrament receives in her illness the strength, forgiveness, and union with Christ it confers. The grace of the sacrament unites a woman's suffering to Christ, strengthens her soul, forgives her sins, and sometimes restores bodily health.

## When to Receive It

A woman should receive the Anointing of the Sick when seriously ill, before surgery, in grave illness, or in the frailty of age, not waiting until death is near. The right time to receive the Anointing of the Sick is at the onset of serious illness, not at the last moment, so that a woman should seek it when she faces grave illness, before a serious operation, or in the weakness of advanced age, and should see that her seriously ill loved ones receive it in good time, not delaying until the person is dying but calling for it while its healing grace can be received with full awareness and benefit. This means a woman does not wait until death is imminent to receive or seek this sacrament but calls for it at the onset of serious illness, so that she and those she loves receive its grace when it is meant to be received, in the midst of illness rather than only at its end. The woman who understands when to receive it seeks the Anointing in serious illness, not waiting until death is near. When to receive it is at the onset of serious illness, before surgery, in grave illness, or in the frailty of age, not waiting until death is near.

CHAPTER SIX

# Holy Orders

## *The Priesthood She Depends On*

Holy Orders is the sacrament by which bishops, priests, and deacons are ordained to serve the Church, and though a woman is not ordained, the priesthood is the sacrament she depends on for the Eucharist, absolution, and the sacramental life. Understanding Holy Orders reveals the ministry on which her own sacramental life rests.

*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*

### The Three Grades of Orders

Holy Orders is conferred in three grades, bishop, priest, and deacon, each with its own share in the ministry Christ gave to His Church. The sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred in three degrees, the episcopate of the bishop, who holds the fullness of the priesthood and governs the local Church; the presbyterate of the priest, who shares in the bishop's priesthood and serves the people through the sacraments; and the diaconate of the deacon, who is ordained for service and ministry, so that the ordained ministry is structured in these three grades, each with its proper role in the service of the Church. This means a woman understands the ordained ministry as ordered in three grades, bishop, priest, and deacon, each serving the Church in its own way, so that she grasps the structure of the ministry through which the sacraments come to her. The woman who understands the three grades of Orders knows the ordered ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon that serves the Church. The three grades of Orders are bishop, priest, and deacon, each with its own share in the ministry Christ gave to His Church.

### The Permanent Character of Ordination

Ordination imprints a permanent character on the soul of the ordained, configuring him to Christ the Priest in a way that lasts forever and cannot be undone. Like Baptism and Confirmation, Holy Orders confers an indelible character, a permanent spiritual mark that configures the ordained man to Christ, so that ordination is not a role that can be set aside but a permanent reality, the priest conformed to Christ the Head and Shepherd in a way that endures forever, acting in the person of Christ when he celebrates the sacraments, his priesthood a permanent configuration rather than a temporary office. This means a woman understands the priesthood as a permanent character, the priest configured to Christ forever, so that she sees the ordained man not merely as a

functionary but as one permanently conformed to Christ, acting in His person in the sacraments she receives. The woman who understands the permanent character of ordination sees the priest as permanently configured to Christ, acting in His person. The permanent character of ordination configures the ordained man to Christ the Priest forever, a mark that lasts and cannot be undone.

### Why the Priesthood Matters to Her

The priesthood matters profoundly to a woman, for it is through the ordained priest that she receives the Eucharist, absolution, and the sacraments on which her spiritual life depends. Though a woman is not ordained, the priesthood is far from irrelevant to her, for it is through the ministry of the priest that she receives the Eucharist, is absolved in Confession, is anointed in sickness, and is given the sacramental life on which her soul depends, so that the priesthood is the ministry that delivers to her the grace of the sacraments, and her gratitude, respect, and prayer for priests flow from her dependence on their ministry. This means a woman values and prays for the priesthood because her own sacramental life depends on it, the priest the one through whom Christ gives her the sacraments, so that she honors and supports the ministry on which her access to grace rests. The woman who understands why the priesthood matters to her values and prays for priests, knowing her sacramental life depends on their ministry. Why the priesthood matters to her is that through the ordained priest she receives the Eucharist, absolution, and the sacraments on which her spiritual life depends.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Matrimony

### *The Covenant of Grace*

Matrimony is the sacrament by which a man and woman are joined in a covenant of love that images Christ and the Church, a lifelong bond that is itself a source of grace for those called to it. Understanding Matrimony as a sacrament, and the sacramental character of every vocation, reveals how a woman's state of life becomes a channel of grace.

*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*

### Marriage as a Sacrament

Christian marriage is a true sacrament, a source of grace, in which the spouses confer the sacrament on each other and are bound in a covenant imaging Christ and the Church. Marriage between two baptized Christians is not merely a contract or a natural institution but a sacrament, a true source of grace, in which the spouses themselves are the ministers, conferring the sacrament on each other through their consent, and are joined in a covenant that images the union of Christ and His Church, so that their marriage is a holy and grace-giving bond, raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. This means a woman understands Christian marriage as a sacrament rather than a mere human arrangement, a covenant that gives grace and images Christ's love for the Church, so that she sees the married state, for those called to it, as a holy vocation and a source of grace. The woman who understands marriage as a sacrament sees it as a grace-giving covenant imaging Christ and the Church. Marriage as a sacrament is a true source of grace, the spouses conferring it on each other and bound in a covenant imaging Christ and the Church.

## The Grace of Matrimony

Matrimony confers a particular grace for the married state, strengthening the spouses to love faithfully, bear with each other, raise children, and grow in holiness together. The sacrament of Matrimony gives a grace proper to the married state, a grace that perfects the natural love of the spouses, strengthens them to be faithful and to bear with one another's faults, equips them to welcome and raise children, and helps them grow in holiness through their shared life, so that marriage is not left to natural resources alone but supplied with the sacramental grace the spouses need to live their vocation well. This means a woman called to marriage receives in Matrimony the grace to live it faithfully and fruitfully, a grace available to her throughout her married life, so that she draws on the sacrament's grace for the daily demands of love, patience, and the raising of a family. The woman who understands the grace of Matrimony draws on it to love faithfully and grow in holiness through her married life. The grace of Matrimony strengthens the spouses to love faithfully, bear with each other, raise children, and grow in holiness together.

## Every Vocation a Sacramental Reality

Whether a woman is called to marriage, consecrated life, or the single lay life, her vocation is a sacramental reality, a state of life through which she gives and receives grace in the world. The sacramental vision of vocation reaches beyond Matrimony, for whether a woman is called to marriage, to consecrated life with its vows, or to the single lay life lived for God, her vocation is a sacramental reality, a particular way of configuring her life to Christ and of giving and receiving grace, so that every state of life, lived faithfully,

becomes a channel through which grace flows to her and through her to others, her vocation shaping how she participates in the sacramental life of the Church. This means a woman sees her own vocation, whatever it is, as a sacramental reality, a holy state of life through which she gives and receives grace, so that she lives her particular calling as a participation in the grace-filled life of the Church rather than a mere circumstance. The woman who understands every vocation as a sacramental reality lives her own calling as a holy channel of grace. Every vocation a sacramental reality means that whether a woman is married, consecrated, or single, her state of life is a channel through which she gives and receives grace in the world.

CONCLUSION

## Receiving What You Believe

The woman who received the sacraments without quite knowing what they are now knows. We have seen what a sacrament is, an efficacious sign of grace instituted by Christ; and we have treated each of the seven: Baptism, the new birth that makes her a new creation and a temple of the Trinity; Confirmation, the sealing and sending that completes her baptismal grace and equips her for mission; the Eucharist, the Real Presence in which Christ gives Himself as food and the sacrifice of Calvary is made present; Reconciliation, the sacrament that restores lost grace through the acts of the penitent; the Anointing of the Sick, the healing sacrament for the seriously ill; Holy Orders, the priesthood she depends on for the sacramental life; and Matrimony, the covenant of grace, with every vocation a sacramental reality.

Running through all seven is a single truth: the sacraments are not symbols but encounters, not rituals the Church performs but actions of Christ Himself, in which real grace is truly given. Each one is unrepeatable in what it does, each one changes something, and each one is Christ reaching into a woman's life to give her His own divine life. To know what they are is to be able, at last, to receive them as what they are.

So receive what you believe. Approach each sacrament knowing what is happening in it: that in Baptism you were reborn, in Confirmation sealed and sent, in the Eucharist given Christ Himself, in Reconciliation restored, in Anointing healed, through Holy Orders supplied with the sacraments, and in your vocation made a channel of grace. The sacraments have been given to you not as routines to perform but as encounters with the living God. Receive each one fully, as if you believe what it is, and you will find in them the grace upon grace that Christ pours out, each encounter unrepeatable, each one changing something in the woman you are becoming.

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