

Celebrating Sacraments During Easter

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Easter is filled with energy in our parishes as we celebrate the removal of the rock from the haunting tomb. Christ has resurrected and new life flows abundantly. That new life is seen in the explosion of sacramental celebrations following the Lenten fast. The Easter Vigil starts it off with a triple play of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

Springtime calendars are filled with others: first Holy Communion, Confirmations, weddings, and infant Baptisms.

It is convenient to celebrate sacraments during the Easter weeks. The sanctuary blossoms with life and fragrance. Yet at a deeper level, sacraments are closely related to the Easter event. All the sacraments are encounters with the risen Lord. The Emmaus story (Luke 24:13–35) relates this connection well.

It begins with two disciples, dejected that their friend Jesus has been killed. Leaving Jerusalem, they head for Emmaus. Jesus accompanies them, yet they see him as a stranger. They recount the past days' events, including the visit to the empty tomb, the angels' telling the women that Jesus was alive, and that the apostles did not see or believe. Then, the first of three important moments begins.

First, the Risen One enlightens them. Jesus breaks open and interprets the scriptures. Second, a sacramental moment is presented as a gift. "When at table Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30). The Word alone was insufficient. The encounter is completed with this gift of a sacramental gesture. Finally, the Lord vanishes, and their future is changed as they turn around to head for Jerusalem, the center of Christ's saving actions.

What Emmaus, and all Resurrection stories teach us, is that encounters with the Risen One spark change. These encounters are not limited to the days after the Resurrection but continue in the sacramental ministry of the Church. We meet the living and risen Christ in the sacraments. From them we are sent. "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." "You have been freed from all

your sin. Go in peace." "You are no longer two flesh but one. You are now husband and wife." These are phrases from the sacraments that witness to the tremendous transformative power they release. The sacraments change us and strengthen our identity with Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Recall a powerful sacramental moment. What was it like as you left?
- What might help you more actively "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord?"
- Has a sacrament sparked a life change? Would that have happened without the Church's involvement? Why or why not?

HOME ACTIVITIES

Look at family pictures from past sacraments: a baby's Baptism, a wedding day, first Eucharist. Share what you remember. How was your faith affected?

Spend time with one of the scripture stories listed below or for the coming Sunday. At Mass, be mindful that you are part of the story and in contact with the Risen One. **R**

SCRIPTURE CORNER

Luke 24:13–35

Acts 8:26–40

Acts 9:1–20

These are stories of transformation and encounters with the Lord. Imagine yourself in them. How might you react?

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