



SACRAMENTS AS SIGNS OF REDEMPTION

BY JOANNA DAILEY

We do not often use the word *redeem* in ordinary life, but it has its moments. We redeem coupons at a store. We might say something like, “This old table was redeemed from the scrap heap” or “This afternoon I am going to the dry cleaner to redeem my shirts.” What can we learn from these uses of the word *redeem*? Generally, we can say that to redeem something implies taking something from one state of being to another. A coupon is just another piece of paper until we redeem it and get some value in return. An old table is doomed until someone with a good eye redeems it and makes it useful and valuable again. Shirts will stay at the dry cleaner forever unless their owner comes and redeems them—gets them back to his closet where they belong.

TO BUY BACK

The word *redeem* comes from a Latin word meaning “to buy back” or “to purchase.” Meanings for the word *redemption* include “deliverance” or “rescue.” At the time of Jesus, this is what many of the People of God were looking for. They were a conquered people, being ruled by the Romans. Faithful Jews were awaiting the Messiah who would deliver them from their oppression. It was at this time that God chose to send his Son into the world as its rescuer, its deliverer, and its redeemer, not just for the Jews but for all people. As Jesus himself said, he did not come to destroy the Old Law but to fulfill it. When people were tithing their harvests of herbs and spices to give one tenth to the Temple, as the Law directed, he did not object. He commended them. But he also warned them not to neglect the bigger things, like mercy and fidelity. Jesus accused the leaders of being blind guides who were straining out gnats but swallowing camels (see Matthew 23:23–24)! In the New Law, **Jesus gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit to reform our hearts to love as he does** and to carry out God’s commandments.

The People of God at the time of Jesus definitely needed redemption. They needed to be brought back to the truth about God and about themselves and into a graced relationship with God, freed from the burden of sin. So that was the mission of Jesus: to conquer sin and death, to redeem his people, and to bring them back to God, in freedom and in truth.

WHAT ABOUT US?

Are love and faithfulness gaining ground in our time, in our lives? Are we concentrating on the bigger things in our lives and in our world? Or are we straining out gnats while swallowing camels? You may have heard the saying “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” Keep the bigger picture—what life is really about—in mind. How are you doing on that? Fortunately for us, the teachings of Jesus and his work of redemption did not die in the tomb. His work of redemption reaches people of all times and all places.

Joanna Dailey has been involved in education and in Catholic publishing for almost forty years. Her journey in religious and liturgical education began when, at the age of seven, she began matching the pictures in her prayer book with the words (in Latin) and actions of the priest at Mass. Along the way, she has earned two master’s degrees: one from Fordham University in religious education and one from Bank Street College of Education in infant/toddler education.