

# Introduction to the Sacraments

## Core Activity

### Rituals, Symbols, and Signs

1. Solicit definitions of the words *ritual*, *symbol*, and *sign* from the students and write their thoughts on the board, on newsprint, or on an overhead. Summarize the thoughts the students have offered, and then define the three words using information from pages 183–184 of *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, Third Edition (CFH)*. Before continuing, be sure the students understand the meanings of those three terms.

2. List the following rituals on the board:

- getting one's first driver's license
- the prom
- the inauguration of the president of the United States

First ask the students to name actions that are part of those rituals. For example, enjoying an elegant dinner is an action in the prom ritual, and taking the driving test is part of getting one's driver's license.

Second ask the students to identify signs that are part of those rituals. In the driver's license ritual, the license itself is a sign; it says that the driver can legally operate a vehicle. In the inaugural address ritual, the presidential seal indicates that the president is speaking.

Third ask the students to identify the symbols that are part of those rituals. A boutonniere or a corsage is a symbol of the affection one feels for one's date to the prom. The keys to a car are a symbol of newfound freedom for one who has just gotten a driver's license.

3. Offer a presentation on the Sacraments, using the preceding reflection on secular rituals to illumine ritual action, sign, and symbol in this sacred context and using information from chapter 17 of the *CFH*.

4. Conduct a brainstorming session to identify Christian symbols the students might recognize: for example, water, oil, fire, bread, wine, light, and a cross. List them in a prominent place.

5. Invite the students to choose one of the symbols and identify times or ways in which the symbol has been meaningful.

6. Continue your conversation with the students, and use points from pages 185–186 of the *CFH* to help them recognize that the Sacraments are more than just symbols.

7. Ask the students to name the Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church, and give them introductory information about the Sacraments from pages 187–189 of the *CFH*.

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Liturgy and the Sacraments* manual.)

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## Core Activity Extension

### Symbols of Life

Ask the students to write a reflection on a secular ritual they have experienced and a reflection on a sacred ritual they have experienced. For a secular ritual, they could write about anything from a concert to a Fourth of July celebration. For the sacred ritual, they could write about the Sunday Eucharist, a Confirmation they have experienced, or a Matrimony ceremony they have witnessed.

In their reflection, they should identify the following elements:

- the key actions
- the signs
- the symbols

After identifying such, they are to address the following questions:

- What made the key actions ritualistic?
- What did the signs signify?
- What did the symbols symbolize?

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Liturgy and the Sacraments* manual.)

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## Additional Activities

### Ritual Gestures and Actions

1. Let the students know that you will be doing a prayer service during class. Instruct them to clear their desks with the exception of a strip of paper and a pen or pencil. Select a reader and provide a Bible for that person.

2. Invite the students to stand and begin the prayer with the Sign of the Cross. Then ask the reader to read Hebrews 4:14–16. After allowing a moment of silence, ask the students to be seated. The passage from Scripture speaks of approaching Jesus to receive help. Instruct the students each to write a prayer for God's help. Assure them that their prayers will not be read by anyone.

3. After the students have written their prayers, direct them to fold up the papers and to place them on the middle of their desks. Then ask the students to place their hands on their papers and to leave them there while you pray for all the intentions written on the papers.

4. Call the students to process—a row at a time—to the front of the class, bringing their prayers with them. Have a basket to collect the prayers at the front of the class, and instruct them to place their prayers in the basket. Invite them to return to their seats and remain silent while the class continues to process.

5. After the procession tell the students to kneel next to their desks. As they kneel, ask the students to pray the Lord's Prayer with you.

6. Invite the students to stand with their hands raised in prayer and pray a closing prayer of thanksgiving that includes joyful gratitude for God's faithfulness in hearing their petitions.

7. Once the prayer service has concluded, ask the students to identify the ritual movements and gestures experienced during the service, which are listed here for your reference. They should also name what the movements and gestures signify or identify.

- standing
- making the Sign of the Cross
- reading the Word
- expressing petitions
- laying on of hands
- processing
- kneeling
- raising hands

8. Conclude by conducting a class discussion using questions such as the ones that follow:

- How did each of the gestures or postures make you feel?
- Which ones were easy and comfortable? Which ones were hard and uncomfortable?
- Why, do you think, do groups of people repeat these gestures and actions?
- What do these gestures and actions say about a person or a group of people?

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Liturgy and the Sacraments* manual.)

## Kinds of Grace

Review the Did You Know? article "Kinds of Grace," on page 183 of the *CFH*, with the students. Ask them to notice and reflect on the different kinds of grace they experience in the coming week. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Liturgy and the Sacraments* manual.)

## Symbols in the Media

Record all the commercials during an hour of prime-time television. Show the recording to your class and have them identify the symbols used in the advertising. Then ask them to name what is being symbolized. Compare those items to the Gospels' virtues. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Liturgy and the Sacraments* manual.)

(The material labeled *TC: Liturgy and the Sacraments* is adapted from *Total Catechesis: Catechetical Sessions on Liturgy and the Sacraments*, by Therese Brown, Laurie Delgatto, Mary Shrader, and Christine Schmertz Navarro, in the Total Catechesis series [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004]. Copyright © 2004 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)