

# Rites

Continued from page 1

hundreds of years the church considered a wide number of acts and objects as "sacraments" before settling on the current seven. Indeed, Martos writes that every religion and culture has sacraments, in the sense that their members seek to experience divinity through a variety of means.

"So it is that Christians assemble in churches, that Hindus bathe in the Ganges, that Moslems make pilgrimages to Mecca," Martos wrote. "But none of these places are visited, none of these actions are performed, none of these objects are revered because of what they are in themselves ... (They point) to something mysterious, something which cannot be seen, something special. And in this sense they are all sacraments, symbols of something else which is mysterious and hidden, sacred and holy."

St. Augustine likewise considered many acts to be sacraments or potential sacraments. In *The Sacraments*, contributing author Father Jared Wicks, SJ, noted that St. Augustine formulated four principles to define sacraments.

For St. Augustine, who died in 430 A.D., sacraments were: (1) holy signs, images or expressions that convey an invisible grace; (2) made up of a material component or element and a word of consecration and conferral; (3) in certain cases, such as baptism and ordination, to be administered once only, without repetition, because they left an indelible mark on the recipient's soul; (4) effective regardless of the moral condition of the person administering them because, ultimately, the sacramental minister was Christ himself.

St. Augustine's criteria could be a valid Catholic definition of sacraments today, except that his first and second principles might arguably be applied to any sacred object or experience.

Scapulars, medals and holy water, for example, might qualify as sacraments under St. Augustine's definition, as would making the sign of the cross, praying the rosary or lighting a vigil candle.

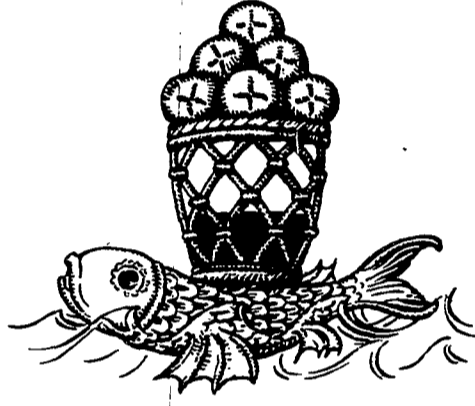
Although such acts might be termed sacraments under St. Augustine's broad definition, today the church clearly defines such devotional practices and objects as *sacramentals*. Canon law defines sacramentals as sacred signs that "somewhat" imitate the sacraments.

Yet unlike sacraments — instituted by Christ, according to church teaching — sacramentals were created and can be abolished at the church's discretion.

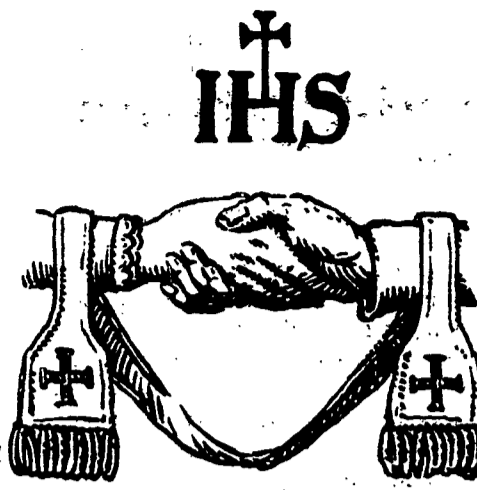
For more than the first 1,000 years of Christendom, the Catholic Church, scholars and theologians drew up lists of sacraments — ranging from as few as three to as many as 30. Some observers suggest that Medieval theologians' eventual agreement on the number seven was partly inspired by seven's representation of wholeness in those times.

In 12th-century Paris, Peter Lombard compiled one of the period's largest theological source books. In the fourth part of the book, which became the standard textbook for beginning theology students, Lombard listed the seven rites known today as sacraments. Because of the popularity of his work, the Catholic Church eventually adopted Lombard's thesis on the number of sacraments.

Lombard's achievement, many scholars note, was to define sacraments in a manner that distinguished them from sacramentals.



This ancient symbol of the holy Eucharist depicts Christ as the fish bringing the faithful His Body and Blood, symbolized by the basket containing bread and wine.



A traditional symbol of matrimony features joined hands bound together by the stole (representing the sacrament) and under the protection of Christ (symbolized by the monogram).

Lombard said sacraments were signs of God's grace that simultaneously were causes of God's grace to recipients. On the other hand, Lombard said sacramentals merely signified God's grace, but did not necessarily convey it.

Unfortunately, however, unscrupulous clergymen twisted Lombard's views about sacraments as a means of achieving grace. These clergymen began to tell the faithful that they could obtain grace by observing certain rituals, without at the same time stressing the need to change their lives. This abuse of sacramental administration was one of the primary causes for the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

Such reformers as Martin Luther blasted their fellow clerics for selling indulgences to believers hoping to stave off eternal punishment for their sins. Luther saw indulgences being sold to entice people to donate money to the church. Other reformers criticized priests who were paid for doing nothing more than saying Masses all day for the dead.

The Counter-Reformation begun at the Council of Trent in the 1540s put an end to many such abuses and led to strict, universal regulations for the celebration of the sacraments.

But Protestant reformers and their flocks in Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Holland, Great Britain and parts of France

had long since dismissed the church's credibility as a teaching institution. These groups began creating their own churches and establishing their own sacramental lives.

The nature of sacramental life in the Protestant churches ranged from the Church of England — which rejected the pope but retained the seven sacraments — to the Anabaptists who went so far as to reject even infant baptism.

The Council of Trent set the tone for sacramental life in the Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council in 1962. In addition to replacing Latin as the language of Mass in favor of the native tongue of each Catholic region, Vatican II opened the way for liturgical reforms that are still being implemented in today's church.

Although some Catholics view Vatican II's sacramental changes as "modern," Father Ehmann noted that many of that council's reformers actually sought to return the church to its roots — roots covered by centuries of historical soil that obscured the sacraments' connection to the past.

Such innovations as Saturday evening Masses, communion in the hand and celebrating the Eucharist in one's native language were common in the first century of Christianity, Martos noted in an essay entitled, "Sacraments: Rooted in History and Changing with Culture." Thus, he observed, they can hardly be labeled "new."

NEXT WEEK: Baptism.



The dove as a symbol of the Holy Ghost was used to represent both baptism and confirmation. The Holy Spirit — the dove — is received at baptism, while the seven flames beneath the dove's wings represent the seven gifts received at confirmation.

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School: \_\_\_\_\_

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