

COLUMNISTS

Our crisis of confidence is not a crisis of faith

The sex-abuse crisis that has been at the center of our attention these past few months may be the most serious crisis the Roman Catholic Church has faced in modern times, but it does not involve a crisis of faith.

Catholicism is, in its very essence, a sacramental faith and a sacramental community, and the priesthood is essential to its sacramental life. This crisis points a dagger at the heart of the priesthood, raising questions about its integrity, its spiritual health and its viability.

Catholics remain in the church not because of the pope or the bishops, but because they wish to draw upon the spiritual riches of its sacramental life.

They celebrate birth in the sacrament of baptism, a celebration that is not limited to the formal rite in which water is poured on the infant's forehead. Rather, it involves the preparations, the gathering at the baptismal font, the reception and gift-giving.

Catholics celebrate the coming of age with the sacrament of confirmation, and a couple embarking on a new stage of life in the sacrament of matrimony.



essays in
theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

They express their solidarity and support of a seriously ill loved one in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. Like baptism, it is not limited to the rite of anointing alone but involves the whole process of caring for the sick person, of praying together, and of aiding in the loved one's recovery, if that be God's will.

And should the loved one die, the ritual includes the wake, the funeral liturgy, the burial and the subsequent gathering for a meal and visitation. It is also an occasion for celebration of, and thanksgiving for, the life of the deceased.

Catholics seek the consolation of the sacrament of reconciliation (also known

as penance or confession) when they fall from the standard of the Gospel. While relatively few Catholics confess sins directly to the priest in a confessional or reconciliation room these days, they flock to church whenever a communal penance service is held.

They also have a real, though incomplete, experience of the sacrament at the beginning of Mass when the presider calls upon the congregation to be mindful of its sins and ask God's forgiveness.

But at the heart and center of the church's sacramental life is the Eucharist, which the Second Vatican Council called the summit and the source of the whole Christian life. It is at the Eucharist that the church becomes most visibly present and active in the world. It is the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and the People of God at worship, participating sacramentally in Christ's worship of the Father, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Presiding over that central act of worship is one commissioned to that high pastoral and ministerial responsibility by the sacrament of holy orders.

Without holy orders, there is no Eucharist. Without an adequate number of psychologically and spiritually healthy priests, the church is, to a large degree, deprived of the gift of the Eucharist.

After Jesus Christ himself, the Holy Spirit and the Gospel, the sacraments are the Catholic Church's greatest assets.

Why, then, is this not a crisis of faith? Because the failures of individual priests and their bishops do not challenge, much less undermine, the truth that defines and distinguishes Catholicism.

This is a crisis of confidence and trust in the bishops as a group and in some priests as well. It is not a crisis of faith.

We can still believe in the God who created us, sustains us and promises us eternal life; in the Christ who redeemed us and offers himself as a model of human life itself; and in the Holy Spirit who makes all things new and by whom we hope to be fully transformed at the end.


Hierarchies come and go; the faith endures.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

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Kids' Chronicle

Answers from page 12:

(15 books) Ruth, Samuel, Nehemiah, Esther, Psalms, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Acts, Romans, Ephesians, Titus, Philemon, Peter.

Thoughts to Consider



EDWIN SULEWSKI
Funeral Director

**What are some ways
to help a child who
has lost a parent?**

First it is important to make sure the child is honestly included in all information and planning. This means being honest about the death and answering the child's questions. It also means allowing but not forcing children to go to the funeral or visitation as they wish. Secondly, a child needs love and security. Let a child know they will be cared for, take an interest in schoolwork and include them in play. Some children resent being pressured to accept burdens beyond their reach. "Taking over for Dad or Mom" may be too much responsibility. Naturally, changes will occur but a child needs time and help in adjusting to them.

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