



THE SACRAMENTS

DISCOVERING THE TREASURES OF DIVINE LIFE

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WELCOME TO THE SACRAMENTS

It's been a busy couple of years here at Saint Benedict Press as we released a string of parish programs. Perhaps you have already participated in or led a group through *Doors of Mercy*, *Queen of Heaven*, or *Kingdom of Happiness*, but I am pleased to tell you about two other recently released programs.

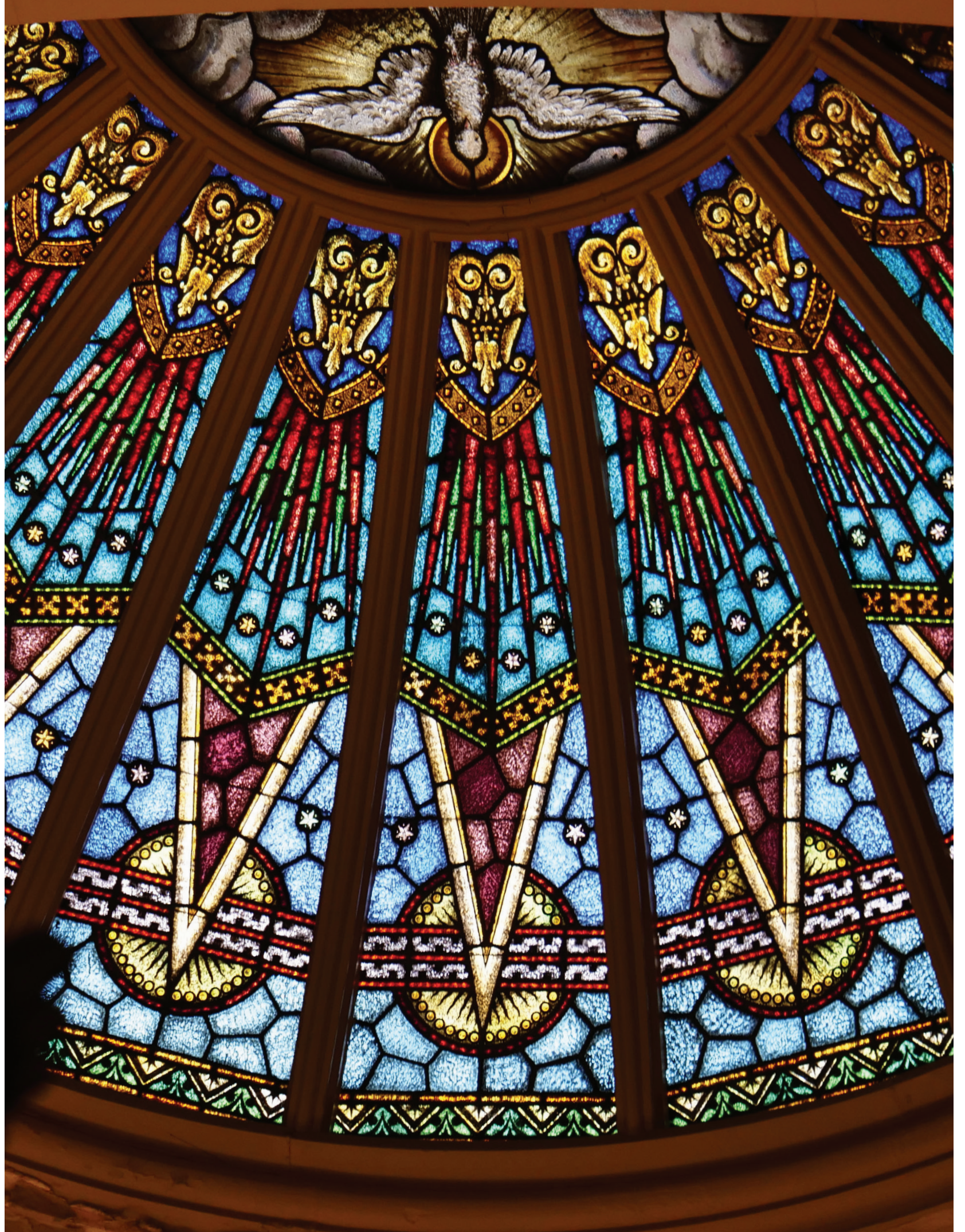
Real Suffering: Finding Hope and Healing in the Trials of Life is hosted by Dr. Bob Schuchts. It explores the nature of human suffering, specifically in the areas of physical pain, emotional loss, and spiritual guilt. Dr. Schuchts draws on decades of experience as a marriage and family counselor, as well as his own personal crosses, to help those who have endured trauma and hardship find understanding and healing.


We also partnered with the Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph and the Thomistic Institute to bring you *Credo*, a groundbreaking RCIA program. We knew the Dominicans have been educating the faithful for centuries and so wanted to be a part of continuing that tradition. The program includes a beautiful book and a series of lectures by some of the brightest minds in the Church, as well as powerful interviews with ordinary converts to the Faith.

All that brings us to the program you are about to embark on. In the middle of coordinating projects about suffering and about bringing people into the Faith, the sacraments kept popping up again and again. These seven seemingly “ordinary” things are the backbone of the Church and of our spiritual wellbeing, and yet we didn't see a program out there that gave a deep, scriptural understanding of these divine gifts. In completing *The Sacraments: Discovering the Treasures of Divine Life*, you will come to see how these gifts from Jesus Christ and Holy Mother Church are so vital not just to our salvation but to our daily happiness.

Fr. Matthew Kauth is a personal friend, so perhaps I can be accused of bias, but I think what he has done with this program is profound and will have an immense effect on your appreciation of the seven sacraments. You will never again look at them the same way.

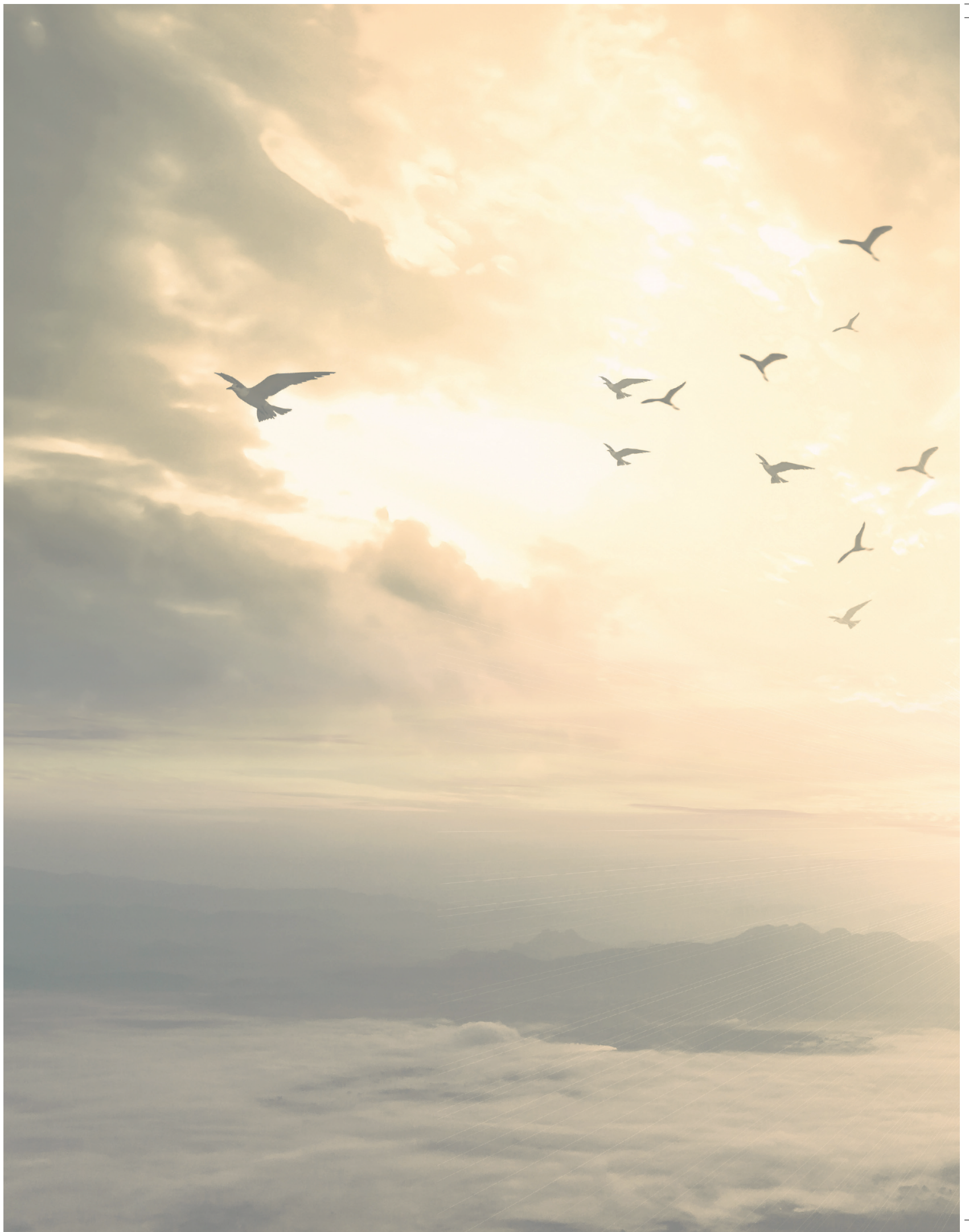
Conor Gallagher, Publisher





A SACRAMENT IS A SIGN
THAT COMMEMORATES
WHAT PRECEDES IT—
CHRIST'S PASSION;
DEMONSTRATES WHAT
IS ACCOMPLISHED IN
US THROUGH CHRIST'S
PASSION—GRACE; AND
PREFIGURES WHAT THAT
PASSION PLEDGES TO US—
FUTURE GLORY.

—St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh III, 60, 3*



THE SACRAMENTS

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR GUIDE

What's inside your *Sacraments Study Guide*? Here's an overview:

The Study Guide is divided into eight lessons. The following elements appear in each of them.

LESSON INTRODUCTION

It will be helpful to read this short passage before embarking on each lesson.

LESSON READINGS

Each lesson is drawn from the teaching video and is supported by Scripture passages, teachings found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and other writings of the saints and Church Fathers. Each lesson contains short suggested readings pulled from some of these sources. These readings are optional but will better prepare you for the material. The scriptural texts quoted in the *Study Guide* come from the Revised Standard Version—Second Catholic Edition (Ignatius Edition) translation of the Bible.

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer should be woven into every aspect of our lives, especially when embarking on a study like this. Open each session with an Our Father and close the sessions with the prayers provided.

VIDEO LESSON: THE SACRAMENTS

Come to a richer understanding of the Church's sacraments as you embark on the teaching video hosted by Fr. Matthew Kauth and complemented by other thematic pieces. Key highlights are provided with room to take notes, which will help you with the group discussion that follows.

KEY TERMS

Each lesson contains several terms that are helpful to know and review.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

If your study has ten or more participants, you may hold discussions in smaller groups of five to seven. Each small group will have its own discussion leader prepared to guide the group. The small group discussion for each lesson will respond to two sets of questions: “Lesson Review” and “Life Application.”

LIVING THE INCARNATION

The Incarnation changed everything. It *is* everything. Not surprisingly, then, the sacraments follow the incarnational principle. Just as God came to us in the flesh through the Incarnation, he chose to make himself known to us and accessible in and through material things. This is the basis for the Church’s seven sacraments. In this part of your *Study Guide*, you will be challenged to make a personal reflection and determine if you are putting the sacraments, and thus the Incarnation, at the core of your daily life. This can be read individually or discussed as a group.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Spread throughout each lesson are various quotations and excerpts to help you understand the profound importance of the sacraments. These include:

God’s Word: Scripture passages from the key moments of each session.

From the Catechism: Supporting passages from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Saints on the Sacraments: Quotes from these holy men and women of the Church.

The Popes Teach: Helpful insights and inspirational messages from encyclicals, homilies, and books written by the popes throughout the ages.

FURTHER READING

Each lesson contains a list of other titles that you can read to further your knowledge of the sacraments and go deeper than what was contained in the lesson.

GROUP STUDY SESSION PLAN

What does a typical one-hour study session look like? Here's an overview.

BEFORE THE SESSION

- Review your **Living the Incarnation** from the prior lesson to consider the ways you have placed the sacraments and the Incarnation at the center of your life (will not apply to lesson 1).
- Review the optional **Lesson Readings** section.
- Read the **Lesson Introduction**.

SESSION

- Welcome and **Opening Prayer** (5 minutes)
- **Video Lesson**: hosted by Fr. Matthew Kauth (20–25 minutes)
- **Small Group Discussion** (20 minutes)
- **Living the Incarnation** (5 minutes)
- Conclusion and **Closing Prayer** (5 minutes)

AFTER THE SESSION

- Review the self-study material, including **Key Terms**, **Words of Wisdom**, and **Further Reading**.

MY PERSONAL CHECKLIST

At the beginning of the first group session of *The Sacraments*, you'll have the opportunity to review "My Personal Checklist: Before the Study" (p. xii), which is a list of some personal benefits that we hope you will receive through this experience.

At the end of the last lesson, you'll have the opportunity to review "My Personal Checklist: After the Study" (p. 88) so you can reflect on the areas in which you have grown personally through the study.

MY PERSONAL CHECKLIST

Before the Study

Here are some personal benefits you can receive through the time and focus you invest in *The Sacraments*. Check all those you hope to receive. At the end of the study, you'll have a chance to review the list again to reflect on the areas in which you've grown.

This checklist is for you only; it will not be shared with anyone else unless you choose to do so.

- I want to understand how the sacraments mirror the pattern of the Incarnation and what that means.
- I want to know what grace is and how the sacraments act as a means of delivering it to me.
- I want to know how the sacraments enrich my relationship with Jesus.
- I'm curious to discover the parallels between what the sacraments do for my soul and what other things like food, water, and medicine do for my body.
- I want to learn why the sacraments have physical things associated with them (bread, water, wine, oil, etc.).
- I want to understand the significance of the words used by the priest, deacon, or bishop when administering the sacraments.
- I am curious to learn what it means when someone says the sacraments impart a "character" on our souls.
- I want to discover the scriptural foundations (both in the Old and New Testaments) of the sacraments.
- I want to know what the effects of receiving the sacraments are and how they can help me in my daily life.
- I want to understand why Baptism is a requirement for salvation.
- I want to know why the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of the Catholic faith and how it is different from the other sacraments.
- I want to better understand the significance of the Mass and how it can help me in my daily life.
- I want to know what the "sacraments of initiation" are.
- I want to fully understand the importance and significance of the sacrament of Confirmation.
- I want to understand why we confess our sins to a priest.
- I want to know why we don't have to be re-baptized each time we sin, but only must go to confession.
- I want to know why marriage is between a man and a woman and how the sacrament of Matrimony can serve as a channel of grace to both husband and wife.
- I want to discover why Anointing of the Sick is such a vital sacrament and how it strengthens those close to death.
- I want to know why the Church only allows male priests.
- I want to know how the sacraments still can be a channel of grace even if they are administered by a sinner.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENTS

You have just done a courageous and dangerous thing. You have opened this guide and embarked on an eight-part study. You have given an unknown author a moment of your time. Your eyes are seeing words and your mind is quickly reducing those words into ideas. Each word you read, by definition, alters you. It is courageous.

Given the nature of this program, it is dangerous as well, but only dangerous to an old life you no longer want. We tend to think of our physical, concrete life as the only real life. Yet is it not true that the interior life is the one that alone has “meaning” for us?

What do we find in our interior? We want more life, maybe even a different life. How often is it that we want to make a new start? We change a look, an address, or even friends, hoping that we will not drag the life we lived before along with us. We want to turn to something new in the hope that it will be different and provide for us what we have lacked up to that point. That desire is quite reasonable. Natural desires have natural objects to which they correspond. If I have hunger, it’s a pretty good indication that there must be an object of that desire; namely, food. It doesn’t mean, as C. S. Lewis once quipped, that we will be able to obtain the food, but it does mean that we are the kinds of beings who replicate our cells by eating.

All of our natural desires have objects which are relatively within our grasp. Yet, when all those objects are obtained, we hear those words once spoken to the rich man by Jesus Christ: “One thing you still lack” (Lk 18:22).

What is that one thing? You lack the fullness of eternal life, which Christ defines for us in the Scriptures: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). This knowledge is more than hearing or reading words. This knowledge is a participation in the life of the Word himself.

St. Peter writes in his second letter: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature” (1:3–5). We escape one life—that is, the life of futile corruption which we have all experienced—and enter into the divine life by actually participating in a divine nature.

My interior life was made to be a place that is inhabited. We have all experienced the enthusiasm of infatuation when the gravitational force of love draws us, almost unwillingly, toward another. Our interior life becomes consumed with the other. The new beloved takes up so much mental space! We think about them in all things and love the thoughts we think. We interiorly orbit the beloved who dwells inside of us in a kind of mental existence. But because the hold is tenuous, we need the other to renew their sentiments with great frequency. When the object of our love is only another transitory human being, it makes for a volatile interior life. It is

hardly a position of stability to cling tightly to another who is himself or herself also falling. Yet, when one is known to be loved and loves in return, there is a certain interior fullness.

What infatuation shows is that we were not made to be alone in the interior life. We are dwelling places. The very nature of motherhood is one incarnate sign that persons are made to dwell in persons. We are made in the image of a Triune God who is himself three Persons in one nature. We resemble this as his image. We long to live in others and have others live in us. It is not sufficient to simply dwell bodily with others. A herd on the hillside does as much. We want to know and be known, to love and to be loved. We desire to have someone who dwells in our interior life.

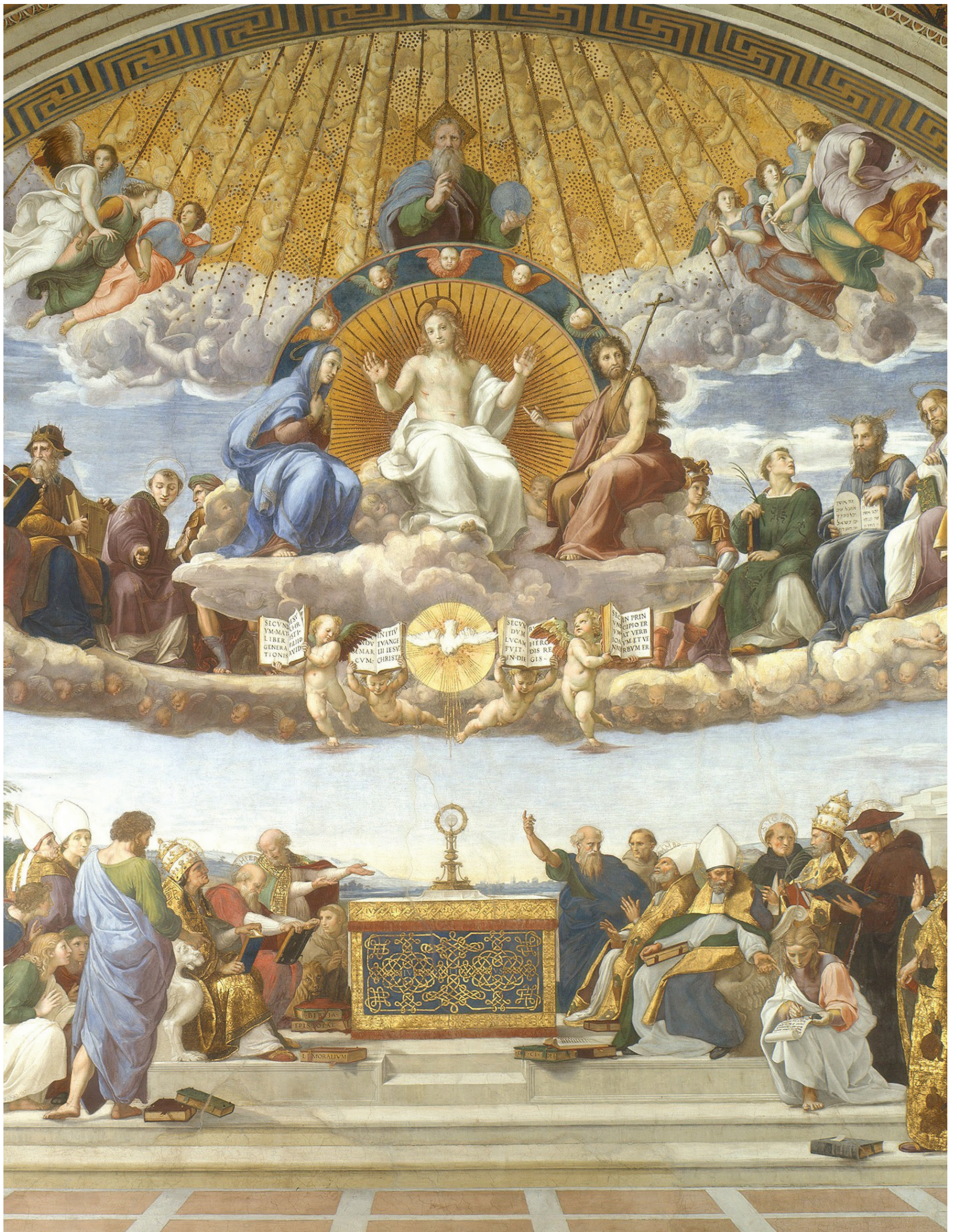
There is a curious passage in St. Matthew's Gospel that talks about interior indwelling: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (Mt 12:43–45). The house of a man's soul might be swept and put in order, but if it remains uninhabited, it becomes a haunted house. We are made to be dwelling places, *but for whom?*

When we enter into friendship with others, there is a true consolation (which means to be with us in our solitude). As much of a consolation as it might be, we quickly find that it is not yet sufficient. There is one thing we still lack. Just as we were not made merely for a human life, we were also not made to be the dwelling place simply of other humans. *We were made to be the dwelling place of God. We were meant to participate in divine life.*

But what does this mean exactly?

Imagine, if you will, the possibility of dwelling in another perfectly, rather than by virtue of that person thinking about you and being of the same mind and heart. What if one could dwell in someone else and actually use their mind and heart as their own? St. Paul says that we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Further, God's love is said to be poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Is this to say that I can have his thoughts? That I can have his love, as if these were my own to use? What sort of a communion is this? This is persons dwelling most intimately in persons! "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

This is exactly what the sacraments effect, and this program is offered as an attempt to assist you to have this life, and to have it abundantly.





LESSON 1

TREASURES OF DIVINE LIFE

What Is a Sacrament?

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field,
which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he
goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

— MATTHEW 13:44 —