CATHOLIC AGITATOR

SACRAMENTS
OF LIFE

SACRAMENTS
OF DEATH

A SACRAMENTAL LIFE
God’s Grace Is Abundant

At a time when almost every church sits empty each night while millions of people sleep on the streets, I know that a spirituality of open doors...could literally and figuratively transform lives.

The Overlooked Sacraments of Christ

By Matt Harper

A few years ago, a dear elder of mine, feeling a profound sense of God’s grace, went as he was baptized into the Catholic Church. Recently, I spoke with a new friend who shared about the near mystical experience he has each time he receives the Eucharist at Mass. I have always hoped for these kinds of experiences and graces from the sacraments. I have continued to show up and participate in the rituals and practices of my spiritual ancestors believing in the promise that if I ask, it will be given to me; that if I seek, I shall find; that if I knock, the door will be opened to me. And yet each time I throw my bucket into these sacramental wells, I feel the clanking tin reverberating through my chest, reminding me that the bucket I draw back to me is, once again, empty. Parched earth floor, no (seeable) grace here.

I consider whether this is a function of some other facet of my spiritual life: an insufficient cultivation of my prayer life? The result of my incessant pursuit of empowered actions over humble faith? Maybe my standard is off: God’s grace is neither magic nor fireworks. Or, maybe I must be patient for these seeds I plant to bear fruit, after all. God’s workings have always been beyond my comprehension and not according to my timeline. Why would now be any different?

What is clear to me is that, despite the lack of grace I perceive in these sacraments, I do not have the sort of “Dark Night of the Soul” St. John of the Cross wrote about. God is not absent from my life, instead, I find grace elsewhere.

Could the problem be that my church has simply chosen a much-too-simplified menu of grace options? Might they have veered off the course when they cherry picked the commands of Christ they saw the people of God commissioned to? I find myself wondering if Christ is not out there, right now, looking for us lost sheep.

Now, I have only the smallest grasp on the vast tradition, canon, and teachings of the Catholic Church. This leads my brain to tell my heart that I should move with humility, curiosity, and caution if I am going to prod any facet of my religion.

And yet I remember Jesus—the Master Prodder—who invited all of us into the simple curiosity and straightforwardness of children. Jesus, the adolescent son who spoke back to his mother. And Jesus the blasphemous young adult who challenged the political figures and religious leaders of his day, and who defied the cultural standards imposed on him. So, I will prod, I pray, like Christ: in pursuit of love and truth. Now I feel compelled to clarify: none of this is to suggest our formal sacraments do not have a place in our lives. Jesus clearly commissioned us to spread the good news, to receive the Holy Spirit, to “do this in memory of me,” to forgive, to anoint with oil, and so on.

Even some of our own practices here at the L.A. Catholic Worker reflect these Catholic sacraments: rituals of entrance, godparent-like guides and supports, weekly reconciliation opportunities, yearly practices to confirm our commitments to this work. And most clear to any who join us, we provide countless opportunities for communion, the sharing of buttered bread (and lives) at table together.

What is clear about the Catholic sacraments is that, at their core, they are profoundly important parts of being human: initiation, healing, and service. And I have to imagine, like so many other parts of our tradition, the roots are deeply good. I am sure these practices began as deep acts of love, sacred long before they became institutionalized, theologized, and thus— for me—routine and impersonal.

So, if these are sacred dimensions of our humanity, why do I struggle to experience what they promise? Is it tied to the difficulty I have believing a priest is needed to mediate our access to God’s deepest graces? Is it the confusion I feel at the exclusionary dimensions of some of these sacraments? Watching my dear friend Christin take her final vows with the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa a few weeks ago left me wondering how many sacred life vocations like hers fall short of the “sacrament” standard given to Holy Orders and Matrimony?

But more than just the sacred life vocations we each pursue, when I look at the life of Jesus, at the graces he invited us into to grow closer to the Creator who shaped us, I struggle to understand why our Church has limited our sacramental graces to these few. Though the Catechism suggests these “seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life,” I find myself asking: are these institutionalized avenues for grace all that Jesus wanted for and from us? Do they appropriately encompass the life transformations Jesus wanted us all to have?

And I find myself wondering: has our
Albert Wingate was one of our dedicated volunteers and generous supporters. Albert and his wife, Linda, began volunteering at our soup kitchen about seven years ago, shortly after moving to Southern California from Texas. They became regular Tuesday volunteers, and Albert, an ordained minister in the Unity Church, often presided at our Wednesday evening interfaith services, which he cherished as an honor and a privilege. Both he and Linda were highlighted in the December 2019 Catholic Agitator.

The computer that I am using to write this obituary and produce this article was a donation from Albert six years ago when he had learned that we were in dire need of a computer after the laptop I was using was crashed, leaving us desperate. Albert called me and said, “Find what you need and I will purchase it.” We have been ever grateful since that time. Albert was born in Houston, Texas, on September 23, 1941. Upon graduating from high school, he attended the University of Houston. He received his graduate degree in law and had a practice in Texas. In 1983 he discerned that he was being called into ministry, and after ordination, became pastor of congregations in Houston, Texas, Atlanta, Georgia, Naples, Florida, and Arlington, Texas before retiring to Southern California.

Other than regularly volunteering at the homeless shelter, Albert was dedicated to their family and enjoyed spending time with their two grandchildren, as well as cooking gourmet meals, and enjoying eating out at fine restaurants. He had a passion for reading, was a lover of the arts, and enjoyed traveling. Albert entered the Holy Family Cloud of Witnesses on June 28 after a long illness. He is survived by his wife Linda, son Erik, his wife Megan, and grandchildren Tyler (12) and Callie (9). He is and will continue to be dearly missed.

ALBERT WINGATE – PRESENTE!

Harper cont’d from page 1

church’s priority for the saving of souls led out the sacraments away from the clear instructions of how Christ wanted us to manifest the kin-dom on earth.

In my own life, my clearest experiences of God and God’s grace have seldom been in a church. The most profound growth I have had in my understanding of God’s wisdom did not come in any formal religious education. I did not hear of my need for humility, mercy, and grace by reading the scriptures, adoring the Blessed Sacrament, or joining in church. In fact, my most profound and consistent encounter with God and the grace that I have found has been in the one Catholic institution my local church tries to forget is part of the fold: the Los Angeles Catholic Worker.

So, what are the sacraments, unof- ficially? I have found through that LACW work and life that have radically transformed my faith, challenged my pride and ego, and led me closer to the God who loved me into being? What outward signs, practices, and commitments have gifted me the inward grace of God? Why hasn’t the Church codified the other Christ given commands that bring us closer to God and Godliness?

Where is the prerequisite sacrament of selling all we have and giving it to the poor, which Christ commanded us before we follow Him?

Where is the sacrament of loving our enemies and turning the other cheek?

Where is the sacrament of washing each other’s feet and binding wounds we did not inflict?

Where is the sacrament of running out to those who have hurt us, asking for forgiveness?

Where is the sacrament of speaking hard truths to the religious and political leaders of our day?

Where is the sacrament of flipping over the money lenders’ tables?

Where are the sacraments of the works of mercy?

Where is the sacrament of using communion for healing, for those who have hurt us, for those who have been complicit in the violence they have inflicted, and for those who have become complicit in the violence we fear what Christ has been calling us to end? Where is the sacrament of flipping our collective cloth, making no mention of the pledge of allegiance nationalism that has so infected our culture and exploitation? Is there no mention of the pledge of allegiance nationalism that has so infected our culture and exploitation?

At a time when the U.S.-caged more people than any other country, when police are welded by citizens to maintain a system of health challenges and poverty, I know these unrecognized sacraments of Christ could reorient our relationships and actions.

At a time when all U.S. citizens have become complicit in the violence, greed, and exploitation of empire so as to raise our collective sacraments at the expense of communities all over this planet, I trust that would work through these less-heeded commands of Christ to produce a new way of being that provides for our world’s needs and not our greediness.

At a time when our homes and churches reside on stolen land, history and current reality that we have not sufficiently reckoned with or made repairs for, I believe the witness of Christ and the sacraments command us to address this imbalance, to confront the deeper implications and uses of our finite resources and energy?

At a time when bishops perceive the “sacred duty and inherent responsibility” to weaponize the gifts of Christ and strip schools of their Catholic identity and ability to celebrate the sacraments, I find myself sure that these unacknowledged sacraments could aid our Church’s return to God’s fold.

At a time when some in our Magisterium choose to identify Black Lives Matter and rainbow Pride flags as symbols that “oppose the teachings of the Catholic Church,” but make no mention of the star-spangled banner that flies above these other “scandalous” pieces of cloth, make no mention of the pledge of allegiance nationalism that has so infected our culture and exploitation?

I am sure these non-institutionalized sacraments could reorient our values away from the idolatry our Church and our church have fallen into.

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The Holy Spirit’s fire, the fire of God’s love, is a purifying fire that transforms and uplifts. By turning and leaving our former ways behind, we will be made new in holiness and wholeness of mind, heart, and spirit. We will then be able to put our love into action while living a Sacramental Eucharistic life.

By MIKE WISNIEWSKI

Each of us, particularly parents, live with various tensions in our lives as we attempt to find some sort of peace and balance. We have to deal with employment issues, health concerns, spiritual interests/obligations, social affairs, and with family, that into our already busy schedules, along with planning an outing, vacation, or a gathering to share our love, and further build and strengthen relationships. We do all we can to provide security, protection, a good education, and bring joy and happiness to our family and ourselves, and rightfully so, it is the essence of love. To “love” as we know, is fundamental to our daily lives and ultimately to our Christian faith. We are called first and foremost to love God and one another. No excuses, no exceptions. Remembering also that we globally are all one family, including the earth and all other forms of life.

At times even the smallest gesture of love can make a huge difference. However, the greatest act of love, as John 15:13 informs, is when we lay down our life for another or for our faith. This type of (nonviolently) lay down our life for another. No exceptions. Remembering love, as Thomas Merton’s words are very apropos: “The brutal reality is that we seem to prefer destructive measures: not that we love war for its own sake, but because we are blindly and foolishly involved in needy and unnecessary attitudes that make war inevitable” (Peace in the Post-Christian Era).

The key word here is “love.” Love, as we know, is fundamental to our Christian faith. We are called first and foremost to love God and one another. No exceptions. Remembering also that we globally are all one family, including the earth and all other forms of life.

As church, to follow his example. What Jesus was saying to and leaving our former ways behind, we will be made new in holiness and wholeness of mind, heart, and spirit. We will then be able to put our love into action while living a Sacramental Eucharistic life.

By JOSHUA FLAUGHER

In May, San Francisco’s Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, stated that U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi is no longer allowed to receive Holy Communion because of her vocal support for abortion rights. Now I am no fan of Nancy Pelosi. I think her loyalty to the elite donor class is not only proof of her corruption, but it has also damaged any real democratic aspirations the U.S. may have had. I think personal thoughts about Nancy Pelosi aside, should she, as a Catholic, be denied the Sacrament of Eucharist?

Personally, I do not believe the Archdiocese has the authority to deny her, or anyone else, the Sacraments. Since the Sacraments belong only to Christ and not the Church, no human being or institution has the right to refuse her. What God has brought together in Christ, do not dare put asunder in the Church. Therefore, only Nancy Pelosi can say whether or not she should receive the Eucharist. However, if I were ministering to Nancy Pelosi, my pastoral advice to her (and anyone else) about whether or not to receive Holy Communion would be to look inside herself. She has to ask herself what the do’s and don’ts are for observing this sacred ritual. Does she think she should be allowed to receive the Eucharist? And, to answer that question honestly, she has to answer what the ritual of the Eucharist means. That being said, I would further explain to her that, for me, the Eucharist has two (and possibly more) layers of symbolic meaning.

The first layer is symbolized by what the Eucharist consists of, namely, bread and wine, the ingression of a standard ancient Mediterranean meal. Bread and wine represent normal Mediterranean dining. The first layer is, in other words, all about food. Through this ministry, Jesus insisted that food (symbolizing the basic material resources of life) was to be fairly and equitably distributed to all God’s children around God’s world. In other words, Jesus imagined God as Householder of our World-Home or Homemaker of our Earthly Home. The perfect illustration, for me, of this first layer of symbolic meaning can be found in Luke 24:13-33, which is the story of the encounter between the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus. After the Crucifixion, two disciples of Jesus, Cleopas and Simon, are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Soon a stranger joins them on the road, but they do not recognize that this Stranger is, in fact, Jesus (who was traveling incognito). The two disciples, who are already discussing the events that had just taken place in Jerusalem, take the time to quickly bring the Stranger up to speed on who Jesus was—a prophet, “mighty in word and deed, who was “delivered” by the Temple authorities to the Romans “to be condemned to death and crucified.” They continued to explain that they were experiencing loss and dis-
When the global Church introduced the Synod on Synodality, this chance for the people of God to guide our Church’s priorities moving forward, we were hopeful for the place justice, reckoning, and repair would come to occupy in these conversations.

So what does justice look like? The Gospels promise is among us now. The Gospels do not permit us to jump around too much. You are not let down to the point that you are no longer a person for us, and no longer have any say in it. Rather, it is a responsibility to do so. Through our tradition is lived and practiced, we promote and practice teaching, learning, and relationships that help us to accomplish our common good.

The future we need is not one of being Church as we are taught so much more to focus on than Christ’s witness and deeds. We are taught to do the personal that we lose sight of the social, political, and economic inequities, unhoused neighbors, universities, and care that honors the holiness and equity of every need over a process that is not made up of people who refuse to trust the Spirit and who refuse to build our capacity. Will we use our power to leverage? Will we use our power to build our capacity?

The Synod on Synodality is an opportunity to move structures but also to hear voices, and to move justice work has in an institution and individual by the decisions of the people. The Synod on Synodality is an opportunity to move justice work has in an institution and individual by the decisions of the people.

The Synod on Synodality is an opportunity to move justice work has in an institution and individual by the decisions of the people. We are invited into those many years ago. Social justice is an opportunity to move justice work has in an institution and individual by the decisions of the people. We are invited into those many years ago.
so quickly lead to practices of hoarding—I choose to believe (in maternal faith) that these forgotten sacraments could open our hearts and direct us towards the communal and spiritual impacts to our hearts, our homes, our neighborhoods, and our world. I hope that we have not fallen for the sacraments of death. These ways are not of Christ. And though our church taunts a theology and tradition that opposes evil, we have no greater distortion of the original. These would not happen if our church centered the sacraments of Christ, opened ourselves to the grasps of God by standing as unrelenting, unrepentant advocates and allies to the discarded. Instead, too often, we often epidemize without casting our financial, human, and systemic lot with these wrenched of the earth. We have access to other sacres of which they could reorient our culture of hope into our systems, and breathe life into the world the way God did to our lungs all those years ago. Is it not time for our return? The spectrum of sacramats is right there before us. The witness of Christ and his specific words and call to action are unmistakable. It is life waiting for life. The new society is not a pipe dream forever in some far-off place. Our beloved ancestors have been to the moutonments of theso about the to land just as Jesus saw it more than two thousand years ago. We have been invited into the transformation required. The graces are there, the pathways is cleat. Oh what a gift it will be to lay down in those good pastures. All it will take is a larger vision of the sacred, for the sacramats waiting for us, inviting us into life. Let us “go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

Matt Harper is a Los Angeles Catholic Worker community member and co-editor of the Agitator.

WINNIEWSKI cont’d from page 2
the lives, core values, and violent and destructive cold—the most brutal force in human history, which should empower one to act and cultivate a more moral and just society. As Griffin states in the Preface, “Christanity began as an anti- imperial movement: there can be no more blot on the Christian message than the use of Christanity to support imperialism (viii).” Further asserting, “Because the recent efforts to fulfill their imperial aims have been justified by the official account of 9/11, Christians have been seeking to work without engaging the truth behind 9/11” (ix). What are the truths that Griffin exposes? For one, that many leaders in the Bush regime and the U.S. military—prior to 9/11 and they did so in order to advance their imperial aims (wars in Iraq for oil, and Afghanistan as a pipeline). In his research, Griffin learned that many of the top leaders in the Bush leaders had, many times in the past, lied about the created threats that were used as pretext to go to or escalate war, listing several examples (such as the Gulf of Tonkin lie by LBJ). He believes that September 1, 2001 was not the first act of terrorism, but formed by the evidence he found is “that the atacks of 9/11 was a ‘false-flag’ attack on our own country by our own US government who made it appear to be the work of Arab Muslims” (3). In the first chapter he lists several forms of terrorism by other nations and the U.S. going back to the Roman Empire to the 21st century. Like fire that transformed chapter he lists existen- tive and damaging oral testimonies by the first responders and medi- cal workers that were not included or misrepresented in the 9/11 Commission Report. Some of those testimonies dealt with multiple ex- plosions heard and felt in the Twin Towers before the collapse, indicat- ing “international professionals that was a ‘controlled demolition’ that caused the implosions.” Chapter four covers the incredible stories of Flights 11, 175, 77, and 93, and the neo-interperation by mili- tary aircraft. Chapter five exposes, in great detail, the Bush regime’s responsibility in this catastrophe. Part Two of the book is a Christian critique of 9/11 and U.S. imperial- ism. Chapter six covers the imperial motivations behind 9/11. Chapter seven extensively encompasses Jesus, the Roman Empire, the Reign of God, and Christianity and empire. Chap- ter eight involves the Divine and the demonic in traditional Christianty thought, including Divine power and demonic power in creation and hu- man history. Chapter nine deals with the U.S. Empire, demonic evil, and 9/11. Chapter ten, and final chapter, is a call to reflection and action. Unfortunately, there is not enough space here to expressively cover all the important material included in this essential book. This review does not, by any stretch of the imagi- nation, do justice. Its content is often difficult to contend with, but necessary if we are supposed to be a people of truth and action. The evil exposed in this book cannot be ig- nored. It is definitively a wake-up call that if avoided at this historic mo- ment, will have tragic consequences for whatever future there is for this nation and the world. I therefore recommend it and help in your dis- cernment process.

Mike Winniewski is a Los Angeles Catholic Worker community member and co-editor of the Agitator.

WINNIEWSKI cont’d from page 3
of which this nation is guilty. But the vast majority have and continue to remain silent, thus complicit. In essence, what is implicit with this silence is that it is categorically unacceptable for the U.S. imperial war machine (in our name with most of our tax dollars) to destroy innocent children and families. And yes, it is difficult to contend with, but necessary if we are supposed to be a people of truth and action. The evil exposed in this book cannot be ig- nored. It is definitively a wake-up call that if avoided at this historic mo- ment, will have tragic consequences for whatever future there is for this nation and the world. I therefore recommend it and help in your dis- cernment process.

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HARPER cont’d from page 4
our tradition lacks. Catholics have long engaged the real, complicated questions about and processes in our world. Many have taken time to deepen their political consciousness and social analysis, seeking greater understanding of all the systems of oppression that distribute power, opportunity, and safety. Programs like JustFaith have sought to educate and mobilize people of faith in deep ways. Let us not waste our time on more documents that do not dive deeper, but rather let us engage our rich tradition and peel back more layers of truth. Let us fund justice- making fire that transforms and uplifts. Let us see the consciences of the rich who are intentionally, self-con- sciously, and publicly committing themselves to live like Jesus, and, if ever necessary, to die like Jesus. This is, of course, an ongoing life-long process, and it is precisely such Eucharistic participation that initi- ates, continues, and consummates it. The Eucharist both proclaims and empowers a life, as St. Paul would say, “in Christ.”

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HARPER cont’d from page 2
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FLAUGHER cont’d from page 3
very passionately for justice, you could die very swiftly from injustice. Furthermore, when the earliest first-century Christians read Holy Communion, they understood all too well what it meant and to what they were committing them- selves. Every time our spiritual ancestors gathered around Holy Communion, they understood that they were pledging themselves to a way of life by participating in the mechanics (the definitely) and death (pos- sibly) of Jesus. They did not have time to debate about the ethics of the “transubstantiation” of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, because they were way too acutely aware of their own “transubstantiation” of law-abiding Roman subjects before their baptism, to outlaw Christian traitors after their baptism. In conclusion, then, who should be allowed to receive Holy Com- munion? Everyone. But who should choose to receive it? Only those who are intentionally, self-con- sciously, and publicly committing themselves to live like Jesus, and, if ever necessary, to die like Jesus. This is, of course, an ongoing life-long process, and it is precisely such Eucharistic participation that initi- ates, continues, and consummates it. The Eucharist both proclaims and empowers a life, as St. Paul would say, “in Christ.”

Joshua Flaugher is a Los Angeles Catholic Worker community member.

YOUNG cont’d from page 5
get news much like the sky being blue, to have priests invite us to the ban- quet of the Lord and to support us as we seek face-to-face encounters with the Living God. Christianty Young is a Los Angeles Catholic Worker summer intern.

KENNEDY cont’d from page 5

THERE IS NO SOLUTION TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND NO HOPE FOR HUMAN LIFE ON THIS PLANET THAT DOES NOT INCLUDE DISARMAMENT AND AN END TO WAR.
The world’s ten richest men own more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of humanity, 3.1 billion people. The richest 20 billionaires are worth more than the entire GDP of Sub-Saharan Africa.

A worker in the bottom 50 percent would have to work for 112 years to earn what a person in the top 1 percent gains in a single year.

High informality and overload due to care tasks have kept 4 million women in Latin America and the Caribbean out of the workforce. Half of working women did not have an alternative income in the U.S. earning less than $15 an hour.

For the past two years the Biden regime and earlier the Trump regime have blocked every effort to make medicines for the COVID-19 virus widely available. U.S. control of the patents has been ruthlessly enforced. U.S. trade officials have now announced that the government will veto a global plan that would allow low-income countries to make their own COVID-19 vaccines. The U.S. says it will block this plan unless China is explicitly excluded from the waiver.
SPECIAL NEEDS

NEW reading glasses 100 - 350 strength.
CANES—either adjustable metal or wood, gently used or new.
Also, Inexpensive domino sets, Tarps, Backpacks (gently used or new). Thank you.

THANK YOU
ST. PAUL HIGH SCHOOL

Each year for the past 49 years, St. Paul High School students, parents, faculty, and alumni raise funds for our soup kitchen by walking a marathon from East L.A. to Santa Monica. We are exceedingly grateful for your dedication to help us feed the hungry. Many blessings!

JOIN US
FOR OUR WEDNESDAY EVENING LITURGIES

If you are not aware, or aware but never seriously thought about it, or have not attended in awhile, we invite and welcome you to join us for our ecumenical home liturgy every Wednesday, 6 pm PDT at Hennacy House, or join us online on Zoom. If you attend in person, after liturgy we socialize over a potluck dinner. It is a pleasant and rewarding gathering; and a good way to spend Wednesday evenings this summer...and beyond.

If you would like to attend online, please e-mail info@lacatholicworker.org to let us know, and we will send you a link and passcode. Hope to see you.

CATHOLIC WORKER

The Los Angeles Catholic Worker, founded in 1970, is part of the international Catholic Worker movement founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. We are a resistance community that operates a free soup kitchen on Skid Row, a house of hospitality in Boyle Heights for some of our unhoused friends from the Row, and publishes this bi-monthly newspaper – the Catholic Agitator. Visit our website - https://lacatholicworker.org and Los Angeles Catholic Worker on Facebook.