

Unit 5:

The Church Is Sacrament

Getting Started

- Assign the students to read Unit 5, “The Church Is Sacrament” (pages 174–213). Then ask them to read the following article.

The Story

Note: The following link contains the full text of Cardinal Fulton Sheen’s 1962 book on the sacraments. For the purpose of this activity, direct students to read only the first section, The Sacraments: A Divine Sense of Humor.

The Sacraments: A Divine Sense of Humor by Fulton J. Sheen

No one can ever understand the sacraments unless he has what might be called a “divine sense of humor.” A person is said to have a sense of humor if he can “see through” things; one lacks a sense of humor if he cannot “see through” things. No one has ever laughed at a pun who did not see in the one word a twofold meaning. . . .

Read the rest of the first section, up to the heading “The Bible Is A Sacramental,” at www.ewtn.com/library/doctrine/SACRAMEN.TXT

Discussion

- Lead the students in a discussion of the following questions:
 1. What is necessary to both understand a joke and to understand the sacraments, according to the author? (*The ability to see a two-fold meaning in things.*)
 2. What does it mean to say that something is a sacrament, in the broadest sense of the word? (*“A sacrament, in a very broad sense of the term, combines two elements: one visible, the other invisible—one that can be seen, or tasted, or touched, or heard; the other unseen to the eyes of the flesh. There is, however, some kind of relation or significance between the two.”*)
 3. How is a kiss like a sacrament? (*A kiss is like a sacrament because it can be perceived with the senses, but it also signifies love, which is unseen.*) When is a kiss not like a sacrament? (*“The physical side of it is present if one kisses one’s own hand, but the spiritual side of it is missing because there is no sign of affection for another. One of the reasons why a stolen kiss is often resented is that it is not sacramental; it has the carnal side without a spiritual side.”*)
 4. What does the author mean when he says the world has become entirely too serious? (*“No significance or meaning is seen in the things that make a sound to the ear, or a sight to the eye. . . modern man no longer believes in another world; they have no story to tell, no meaning to convey, no truth to illustrate. . . faith in the spiritual is lost.”*)
 5. What effect does this loss of a sacramental sense of humor have on the respect that people show one another? (*“When men lose the conviction of the immortal soul, there is a decline in the respect for the human. Man without a soul is a thing; something to be used, not something to be revered. He becomes ‘functional’ like a building, or a monkey wrench, or a wheel.”*)
 6. What two errors can people make about the natural world, according to the author? (*“One is to cut off entirely from Almighty God; the other is to confound it substantially with Him.”*) What, by contrast, is the Catholic way of viewing the natural world? (*“The material universe is a sign or an indication of what God is. We look at the purity of the snowflake and we see something of the goodness of God. The world is full of poetry.”*)
 7. How are the seven sacraments of the Church different from the examples of sacraments, broadly defined, given in the article? (*The sacraments of the Church are a sign and source of God’s saving grace; they transform the community and have a lasting effect on us. The material world points to the spiritual world, but material things cannot save us unless God chooses to use them to do so.*)
 8. The author gives some examples of things that point to a deeper spiritual reality: a snowflake, a handshake, a kiss. What other examples can you think of?

Being Church

Planning a prayer service

- In this activity, students plan a prayer service that incorporates the liturgical and sacramental principles they learned about in the student text and the article. You will need paper and writing instruments for the students to record their ideas, as well as copies of the parish hymnal. The students may also find it helpful to have their textbooks and copies of the “A Divine Sense of Humor” article on hand.
- Divide the students into small groups of about five people each.
- Instruct the students that they will be planning a short prayer service, 15 to 30 minutes in length, using the liturgical and sacramental principles they have learned through their reading.
- Ask the students to begin by choosing a theme for their prayer service. Note that there is nothing that cannot be brought before God in prayer. For example, they could take their theme from a historical event (the anniversary of a local or national tragedy), the liturgical calendar (the season of Lent or a saint’s feast day), a need in the community (the family of a dying man, racial reconciliation), social justice concerns locally or around the world, general issues of concern to teens, and so on. Their prayer service can ask God for healing or hope or the solution to a problem, but it could also be a celebratory thanksgiving for God’s gifts.
- After the students have chosen a theme for their prayer services, ask them to name some of the basic elements of Catholic liturgies: readings from the Scriptures, song, participation by the whole assembly, signs and symbols. Remind the students that Catholics believe that God chooses to communicate with us through our senses: through taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell. Invite the students to develop a prayer service that incorporates these various elements.
- When the students have finished planning their prayer services, have each group present its prayer service to the rest of the students. Deepen the discussion by asking the students to explain why they chose the words, songs, symbols, and actions that they did. Invite them to consider the meaning their prayer service might have for different types of people in the assembly.
- If possible, extend this activity by having all the students plan a prayer service to be celebrated at the next session, using the work they have already done as a starting point. Invite the whole parish to attend.

Additional Activities

- Use the Journal questions on pages 180, 182, 186, 188, 191, 205, and 211 as discussion starters at the beginning of the session.
- Have the students cut out pictures of efficacious symbols in magazines as described in the activity on page 182 of the student text.
- Have students create symbols of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist as described in the activity on page 185 of the student text.
- Lead the students in the sacraments prayer service described on page 189 of the Teacher’s Wraparound Edition or the Ignatian spiritual exercises described on page 206 of the TWE.
- Lead the students in completing the “Matter and Form of the Sacraments” handout as described in the “Extending the Lesson” activity on page 201 of the TWE.
- Have the students create symbols of their life at various ages as described in the “Extending the Lesson” activity on page 209 of the TWE.
- Have the students ask about their baptism as described in the Enrichment activity on page 213 of the TWE.

Additional Resources

- For a bibliography of books related to this unit, see page 220 of the TWE.
- For Internet links related to this unit, see pages 187, 207, and 214 of the Teacher’s Wraparound Edition.
- Videos related to this unit include *Understanding the Liturgy of the Mass* (Ligouri, 1988, 30 minutes) and *Eucharist: Celebrating Christ Present* (St. Anthony Messenger Press).