

At a recent conference I mentioned that when we eat we need digestive juices in order to make our food do for our bodies what it was intended to do. I said sacraments are the same. The digestive juice of the sacraments is faith.

A listener honestly and respectfully questioned my comments. She asked her friend to contact me with the questions. Below is what she wrote:

I can't go tonight or I would ask Steve this question myself but maybe if you get a chance, could you ask him to clarify something he said about Baptism. He talked about Baptism being somehow dependent on the faith of the one being baptized. Maybe I misunderstood him? I don't think it's proper to speak about Baptism in "receptionist" terms but maybe I'm missing something?

My response follows:

Dear Friend:

First, I want to say that I *did* mean what I said in my talk about faith required for Baptism—and the other sacraments. The two go hand-in-hand and both are necessary. I have heard said that in baptism, if one does not have faith or believe—he just gets wet. For example, would an atheist who gets baptized for a joke, have the grace of salvation conferred?

Now, with infants, faith is still expressed through the intention of the parents. Even here it is not allowed, if I remember correctly, to baptize an infant against the will—thus the absence of faith and intention—of the parents.

I think the question arose whether I was denying the *ex opere operato* aspect of the sacraments. No. I understand that the sacraments do what God intends them to do by the fact that they are done. But, as you will see below, the intention and the disposition of the recipient is also a factor and condition.

Of course, in my talk I do not have the time to explain all the details since it is not a talk on the sacraments and I don't want to kill my main point with the death of a thousand qualifications. I was just using the illustration to show how faith was the "digestive juice" of the sacraments, like stomach acids are required for the food we eat to become nutritious to our bodies. It is an apt illustration even though no illustration is completely perfect. My point was that one cannot come to the sacraments cavalierly and without faith and expect to have supernatural and effective results—the same results that are achieved by the believing and faith-filled convert.

Here are a few things that help clarify my point. Please forward them to your friend. Please also tell them that I am very grateful for their kind words and I'm extremely pleased that the talk had a positive effect on their friend.

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The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm>) (13 volume, 1913 edition) states the following. Notice that though “attention” is not required for most sacraments, “intention” certainly is. The underlined portions are what I want to draw attention to.

### **(1) Conditions for valid reception**

(a) The previous reception of Baptism (by water) is an essential condition for the valid reception of any other sacrament. Only citizens and members of the Church can come under her influence as such; Baptism is the door by which we enter the Church and thereby become members of a mystical body united to Christ our head (Catech. Trid., de bapt., nn.5, 52).

(b) In adults, for the valid reception of any sacrament except the Eucharist, it is necessary that they have the intention of receiving it. The sacraments impose obligations and confer grace: Christ does not wish to impose those obligations or confer grace without the consent of man. The Eucharist is excepted because, in whatever state the recipient may be, it is always the body and blood of Christ (see INTENTION; cf. Pourrat, op.cit., 392).

(c) For attention, see above, VI, 6. By the intention man submits himself to the operation of the sacraments which produce their effects *ex opere operato*, hence attention is not necessary for the valid reception of the sacraments. One who might be distracted, even voluntarily, during the conferring, e.g. of Baptism, would receive the sacrament validly. It must be carefully noted, however, that in the case of Matrimony the contracting parties are the ministers as well as the recipients of the sacraments; and in the sacrament of Penance, the acts of the penitent, contrition, confession, and willingness to accept a Penance in satisfaction, constitute the proximate matter of the sacraments, according to the commonly received opinion. Hence in those cases such attention is required as is necessary for the valid application of the matter and form.

Now I refer to the *Catechism* which ties Baptism to faith quite clearly. If one comes to baptism without faith—in other words, he does not believe but goes through the ritual anyway—the effect is not achieved.

**Notice in paragraph 125** that Baptism is the *sacrament of faith*, and that *faith is required for baptism*.

**Notice in paragraph 1123** that the sacraments *presuppose faith* and are called *the sacraments of faith*.

**Notice in paragraph 1127** that the condition for efficaciousness of the sacraments is that they are *celebrated worthily in faith*.

**Notice in Paragraph 1128** that even though the Church affirms that the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: “by the very fact of the action’s being performed”), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all, yet the Catechism gives the following condition:

*Nevertheless, fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them*

**1253** Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe. The faith required for Baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop. The catechumen or the godparent is asked: “What do you ask of God’s Church?” The response is: “Faith!”

**1123** “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it. That is why they are called ‘sacraments of faith.’“

**1127** Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are *efficacious* because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power.

**1128** This is the meaning of the Church’s affirmation that the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: “by the very fact of the action’s being performed”), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that “the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God.” From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.

Hope all of this helps to clarify my statements in my talk. God bless you for all you do and keep up the good work. Now I pray for focused attention to be able to get work done on the script 😊

Your humble servant,

Steve Ray