

# A Deeply Personal Sacrament

## Opening Prayers

*Taken from Psalm 139 (138) - to be said all together or the group can divide in half and alternate*

- All:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- A:** It was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- B:** Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.
- A:** How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!
- B:** I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.
- All:** Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in  
the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

*As we come together let us, either aloud or in the silence of our hearts, give thanks and praise to the Lord for all the things we have accomplished, the joys experienced, graces received and people met over the past week. Let us also remember all those in need of our prayers.*

## Introduction to the Scripture reading

Let us listen carefully to the Word of the Lord,  
and attend to it with the ear of our hearts.

Let us welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice.

*St. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.547) adapted*

## Explore the Scriptures Acts 9:1-19

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.

Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

*Please take a few moments in silence to reflect on the passage, then share a word or phrase that has struck you. Pause to think about what others have said then, after a second reading of the passage, you may wish to share a further thought.*

## Reflection

We are Christians only if we encounter Christ... Only in this personal relationship with Christ, only in this encounter with the Risen One do we really become Christians... (Pope Benedict XVI, 3 September 2008).

Given that many of us were baptised as infants, our first lived encounter with Christ may not compare to that which captured St. Paul's attention on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). Yet, at our own baptism we were each called by name and invited to become a child of God. Each of us were anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and united with Christ in his mystical body. Through his earthly body, the Church, we were joined with our fellow human beings to love as Christ so loved.

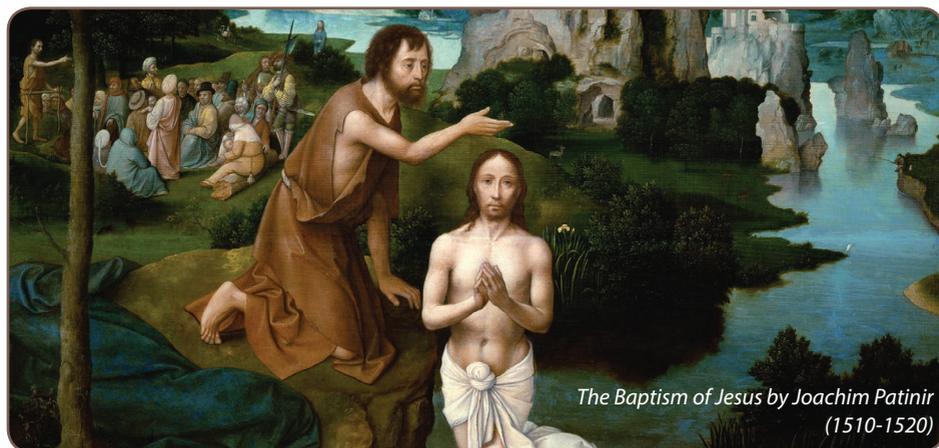
We are reminded of this great gift of baptism – the gift of new life in Christ when we pray the 'Our Father' and join in the sacramental life of the church. Most notably, in the celebration of Holy Eucharist, we encounter Christ in the readings of Holy Scripture, the gathered assembly, the priest in persona Christi and in the

bread and wine which become for us the body and blood of Christ.

Our relationship with God is called to be a deep and personal one. Christ invited us to call God 'Father', an intimate and familial bond. As with any personal relationship, however, differences can and do arise and, try as we might, we often turn away, though action or inaction, from our ever-loving Father. While God remains faithful in love for each one of us, our decision to turn back to God – to be reconciled – may happen straight away or may take place years later. The late Blessed John Paul II speaks of this 'inmost change of heart' as a 'personal conversion' that begins with a deeply personal matter, the acknowledgement of 'one's own sin.' (Reconciliation and Penance, 4, 13) It can be extremely difficult to admit personal responsibility for the wrongs in our life.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* usefully explains repentance as an 'endeavour of conversion [which] is not just a human work but the movement of a "contrite heart" drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.' (CCC, 1428)

In face of this intensely private desire to rest again in the loving embrace of our Lord, the Church offers us the Sacrament of Reconciliation. While visible items – water, bread and wine accompanied by the spoken word make Christ present in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, respectively, in the sacrament of reconciliation, the priest serves in 'persona Christi' – in the person of Christ. It is Christ who heals in this sacrament, it is he who reconciles us and restores our personal relationship with the Lord. While our spoken words – the verbal acknowledgement of our sins help us to commit to resolve not to sin again, the priest's healing words of absolution are the sacramental sign of resurrection, enabling us to begin again our baptismal gift of new life in Christ.



*The Baptism of Jesus by Joachim Patinir  
(1510-1520)*

Just as we are baptised individually with water poured over our heads and we each partake of Christ's body and blood through the celebration of Holy Eucharist, the Church recommends individual confession to heal and effect the reconciliation with God that takes place within our inner most beings. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the gift of a loving God and, as Pope Francis reminds us, 'The Lord never tires of forgiving, it is we who tire of asking for forgiveness' (Angelus, 17 March 2013).

*Are you 'tired' of asking for forgiveness? Are you 'tired' when it comes to prayer? What can be done to invigorate your life in Christ?*

### Closing Prayers

*You may wish to end this session with different prayers, the Our Father or silent reflection.*

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits which you have given us,  
for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.  
Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,  
may we know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly,  
day by day.  
Amen.

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Notes

Remember to visit: [dowsmallgroups.wordpress.com](http://dowsmallgroups.wordpress.com) for more reflections. New sessions for groups will appear here on the fourth Sunday of each month to facilitate monthly faith-sharing groups in between the diocesan Lenten and autumn seasons.