The Sacraments in General

1. The Holy Sacraments are the channels by which the merits of the Sacrifice of the Cross flow to us. As the Mass is a continuation of the Sacrifice of the Cross, so it is also the central point of the Sacraments.

2. The Catholic Church has at all times taught and administered seven Sacraments, because she received this number from Christ through the Apostles, and because seven correspond to all the spiritual wants of man.

3. The outward signs which we see in the dispensing of the Sacraments have been established partly by Christ and partly by the Church. The signs established by Christ are absolutely necessary for the validity of the Sacrament: they are the form and matter of the Sacrament. The signs established by the Church are not essentially necessary, but by them the sublimity of these mysteries become more intuitively evident, as they have great influence on the heart of man, making it, thereby, more susceptible to the workings of grace, which flow from the Sacraments.

By the matter of a Sacrament we understand the act by which the Sacrament is administered, *e. g.*, the pouring of water in Baptism; by the form we understand the words which must be spoken, as in Baptism the words: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father," etc.

4. The Sacraments are divided into the Sacraments of the Dead, and the Sacraments of the Living. Baptism and Penance are called Sacraments of the Dead because they give sanctifying grace to the soul, and have the power of raising the soul from the death of sin to the life of grace. The other five Sacraments are called Sacraments of the Living, because those who receive them worthily must be in a state of grace; they increase sanctifying grace in those who receive them.

The Sacraments are again divided into those that can be received but once, as Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders; and Sacraments that can be received oftener, namely, the other four.

Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders can be received but once, because they imprint on the soul an indelible character, which always remains. In Baptism man becomes a citizen of the kingdom of God on earth; in Confirmation, a soldier, and in Holy Orders, an officer of this kingdom. Each of these three honors leaves an indelible seal on the soul of those who receive them, therefore the graces of these three Sacraments can be renewed every moment.

5. The administration of the Sacraments was confided by Christ to the priesthood of His Church. As the Holy Mysteries upon which Christ has made the salvation of the soul depend must be sacredly administered, He established the priesthood and entrusted it with the administration of the Sacraments. Baptism alone may, in case of necessity, be administered by any one, even by a heretic or Jew, if he use the proper matter and form; even if no necessity existed, Baptism so given would be valid, although unlawful. Confirmation and Holy Orders are administered by the bishop; the other Sacraments by the priest.

The faithful should endeavor to learn the significance of the ceremonies used in administering the Sacraments; this will increase veneration for these Holy Mysteries and help to prepare us for their worthy reception.