

SACRAMENTS

Comments by Pope Benedict XVI

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) was interviewed by Peter Seewald over the course of 3 days. Excerpts from his responses to a number of questions on sacraments follow.

What is the real value of sacraments?

“I believe the seven sacraments truly hold in place the...great events of human life. For these important moments, for birth and death, for growing up and marrying, we need some kind of sign, to give to this moment its full stature, its true promise, and also the dimension of being shared together.

If we look to the sacraments too much...as a means to impart miraculous powers to man and fundamentally change him, then...they fail the test.

Here we are concerned with something different. Faith is not something that exists in a vacuum; rather, it enters into the material world. And it is through signs in the material world that we are brought into contact with God. ...God became flesh and shares himself with us in earthly things.

The sacraments are thus a kind of contact with God himself. They show that this faith is not a purely spiritual thing... The corporal (physical) dimension of faith expresses itself in the sacraments ...and they are entrusted to our freedom, like everything God does; and—like the gospel as a whole—they do not work in a mechanical way but only in company with our free response.”

Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. God and the World. Ft. Collins: Ignatius Press. 2002.