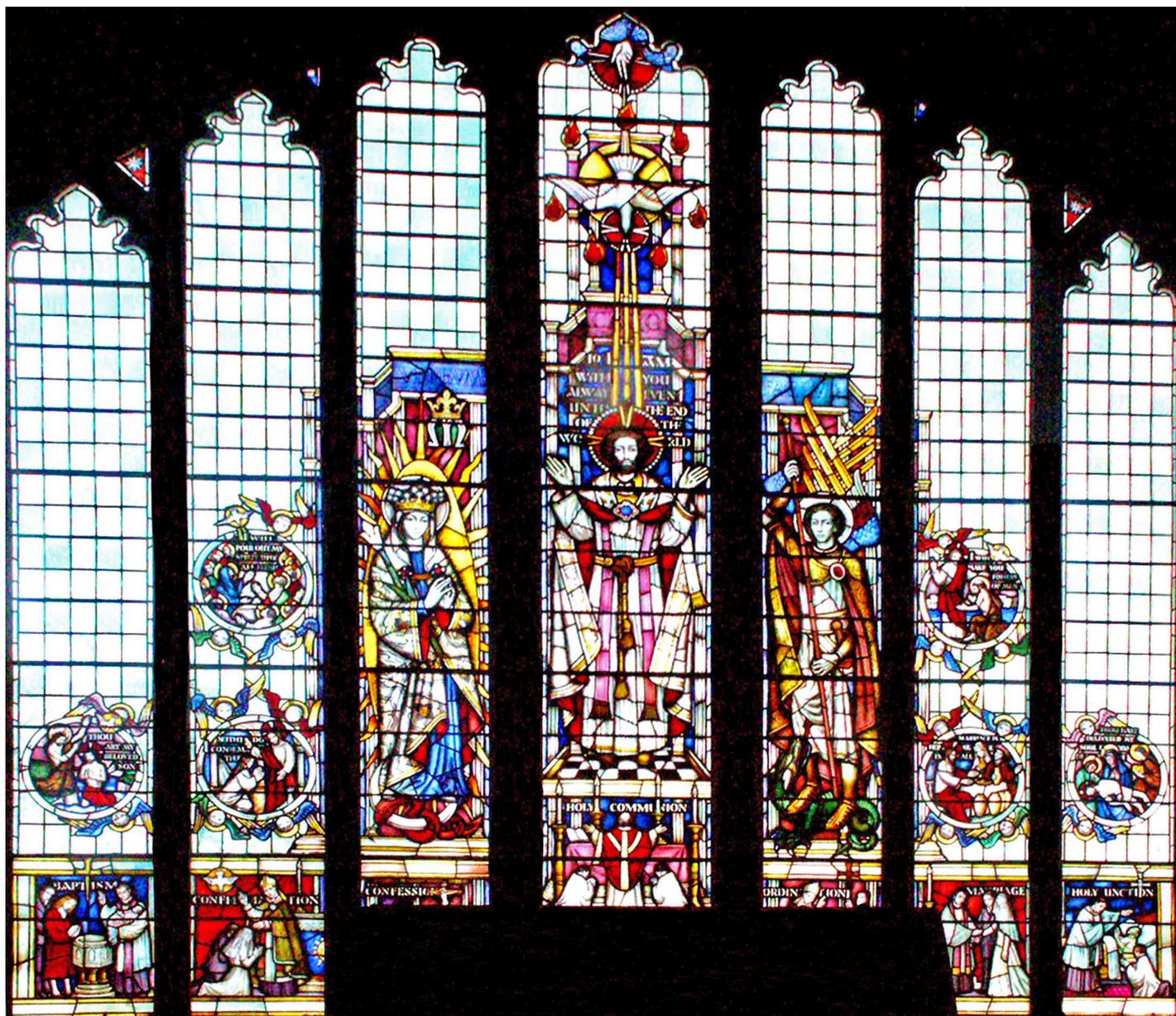


## Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



**East Window: The Seven Sacraments**

**Monday, the third week of Lent.**

## **Reading:** Ephesians 2: 1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

## **Commentary**

Over the next week we shall be meditating on each of the seven sacraments which are depicted in the bottom of the window: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Holy Communion, Ordination, Marriage and Holy Unction. You can see in each a priest (or Bishop) and those on whom the sacrament is conferred, all dressed as one might in the 1950's!

Each of the Sacraments represented in the window has a corresponding roundel above it, bordered by cherubs, and containing relevant scenes from scripture which we will use these to inspire our reflections.

All but Holy Communion, that is, which is instead situated in the centre directly under Christ. This is because, Holy Communion is the sacrament *par excellence*; the centre and source of our faith which holds the Church together by keeping it connected to the life and action of God, the Holy Trinity.

What *is* a sacrament?

The Western Church, under the influence of St Augustine, came to define the sacraments as: ‘outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace’. That they are ‘signs’ of grace does not mean that they are *just* signs in the modern sense of the word. Today, we have come to understand the concept of ‘sign’ in a rather flat way as something which points to a reality situated elsewhere. However, the Early Church understood the sacraments as signs that actually make present that which they signify. That is, they are instruments of the transformative and saving presence of God.

Since the Reformation there have been endless debates about how many sacraments are justified within scripture. Catholic Christianity has always held to seven. However, at fundamental level, there is indeed only one sacrament – Jesus Christ.

The sacraments are only efficacious because they are rooted in the historical reality of the Word made flesh, his life, death and resurrection. As St Paul notes in the passage from Ephesians, we were dead through our trespasses and sins, but God out of his great mercy sent his only Son to raise us to new life with him. Moreover, the saving action of Christ is not a past event but an ongoing reality flowing to us and transforming us via the sacramental life of the Church. Thus, Christ is at the centre of our window.

## **Meditation**

At the heart of the sacraments is the notion of being called, saved, transformed and held, however precariously that may feel, by Incarnate Word. This salvation comes not merely through a 'power' that is conferred, but by the opening up of a relationship from within. Through the sacraments God raises us up to participate in His divine life now and for all eternity.

As St Paul teaches, we cannot do anything to earn this saving divine relationship, but we can cooperate with the grace offered to us in the sacraments. Many of the great saints and mystics have understood this cooperation as a 'letting go' or an 'allowing.'

In a journal or notebook, write down all the things that you are finding hard to let go of. The things that are holding you back from receiving the grace of Christ presence in the sacraments. Read over these meditatively and offer them to God by praying the prayer below.

## **Prayer**

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. Whatever I have or hold, You have given me; I restore it all to You and surrender it wholly to be governed by Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace, that is enough for me. Amen.

*St Ignatius of Loyola's Suscipe prayer*