Introduction to the Sacraments

* There are three elements in the concept of a sacrament: 1. The external- a sensibly perceptible sign of sanctifying grace 2. Its institution by God 3. The actual conferring of grace

* From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1131)- **Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us**

“Efficacious signs of grace” (CCC 1127, 1145-1152) - Efficacious means that something is successful in producing a desired or intended result; it’s effective. Sacraments are accompanied by special signs or symbols that produce what they signify. These are the external, sensibly perceptible signs.

“..instituted by Christ” (CCC 1117) - no human power could attach an inward grace to an outward sign, only God could do that. During his public ministry, Jesus fashioned seven sacraments. The Church cannot institute new sacraments. There can never be more or less than 7. In the coming weeks as we look at each of the sacraments individually, you’ll learn about how Christ instituted each one.

“...entrusted to the Church” (CCC 1118) – By Christ’s will, the Church oversees the celebration of the sacraments.

“...divine life is dispensed to us” – This divine life is grace, it is a share in God’s own life. The sacraments give sanctifying grace which is the sharing in God's own life that is the result of God’s love, the Holy Spirit, indwelling in the soul. Sanctifying grace is not the only grace God wants to give us. Each sacrament also gives the sacramental grace of that particular sacrament.

* The sacramental principle- This is the idea that God engages both our body and soul (sense and intellect) to affect our salvation in order to sanctify the whole person. The sacramental principle affirms the goodness of the material world and of matter in general.

* Matter and Form: Matter- what is perceptible to the senses, it is either a physical substance or a perceptible action. Form – refers to the words that are spoken in prayer of the sacrament. Both the matter and the form of the sacraments come from Christ and the apostles; because of this divine origin, the Church teaches that if either matter or form is lacking there is no true sacrament.

* Validity and Invalidity: To say a sacrament is valid is to say that is has truly and really been brought about. Besides matter and form, a valid sacrament needs two additional elements: a
validly ordained minister (there is one exception to this but I don’t want to give it away, you’ll have to listen for it in the coming weeks) and the intent to do what the Church does when administering a sacrament. When a sacrament is invalid, there is no real sacrament. Invalidity can be brought about in several ways: defect of form, defect of matter, lack of the properly ordained minister, or the lack of intent.

* Purposes of the Sacraments- from the Catechism (1123)
  - to sanctify the recipient (conferring of grace)
  - to build up the Church, the Body of Christ (gives sanctification to the Church to help carry on Christ’s work on earth
  - to give worship to the Father (all we do should bring us to closer relationship with God and should bring Him glory)

*Three groups of sacraments- Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist) Sacraments of Healing (Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick) Sacraments of Service (Matrimony, Holy Orders)

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders are received only once. This is because they imprint a specific character on the soul. It is an individual mark that God puts on the soul, a permanent quality with lasts forever.