

Q: What does it mean to be Anglican*?

Answer Part III: Sacramental

**This is the focus question for Synod (this decision-making body of the wider Anglican church) which met yesterday, November 8th, so I am using the Question of the Week for the coming weeks to examine different aspects of how we might answer.*

Anglicans believe that we can't say everything with words. We honour the power of symbols, art, music, and ritual in order to express the inexpressible realities of our human experience in God. To understand more fully what this means and why this is important, let's talk about marriage. Marriage is no longer, strictly speaking, necessary. The law provides for just and proper division of property ownership and care of children, whether or not a marriage has taken place. For most of society, marriage is no longer considered the gateway to adult sexual relationships. And yet, people continue to want to get married, to have their relationship celebrated and marked in an intentional way, using symbols like rings, flowers, gowns, banquets, champagne, to express what this next step of committed relationship means. When talking to people who have been married, particularly after having lived together before their marriage, I often ask, 'does it feel different?' More often than not -- although a marriage no longer involves the dramatic change of beginning to share a household -- the answer is 'yes, I feel different.'

A **sacrament** is an outward and physical sign of an inward and invisible grace. It is an action, usually using ordinary physical objects as symbols, by which we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives in an intentional way and believe that we are changed by doing so. Baptism and Eucharist (Communion) are our two central sacraments. Water, oil, light, bread, wine, are the ordinary, everyday items that are used in these two rites to try and express our belief that in the waters of baptism and the meal at God's table, God becomes joined to us in a special way. Baptism and Eucharist keep us connected to God, connected with our identity as followers of Jesus and children of God, particularly because Jesus himself gave us the model for these two sacraments in his own life.

Confession, Ordination, Marriage, Anointing of the Sick, and Confirmation are also considered sacraments, although Anglicans hold them as secondary to Baptism and Eucharist. Each of these rites involves our prayer that the Holy Spirit be present to us and our belief that we are in some way changed by God's grace through the combination of prayer and symbol.

However, it is actually the Orthodox tradition that gives insight into the approach Anglicans have to worship, as well as to life in general. The Orthodox church refrains from making a list of sacraments, from too narrowly defining what a sacrament is, or when and how it works. Instead, there is a recognition of the sacredness of created matter -- that the people of God, the Body of Christ, can use objects of God's good creation -- candles, art, music, bread, wine, water, ashes, altars, icons, etc -- to open our prayer, to express the inexpressible mysteries of God, to invite God's presence in our lives, to open our eyes and hearts, to be touched by God in new and powerful ways. To that end, I invite you to notice how sensual our worship is, how it engages our senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound, and how this opening of our senses then invites us to go out into

God's world with an attentiveness to the presence of God in and through the everyday –
miraculous! – world around us.