

The Church today stands waiting.

The Ascension has happened.
Christ has returned visibly to the Father.
Pentecost has not yet come.

And the apostles gather with Our Lady in prayer.

Waiting for the Holy Spirit.

Waiting for grace.

And that waiting matters.

Because grace is not mechanical.

God does not form souls identically or all at once.

He works personally.

Patiently.

Uniquely.

And perhaps that is exactly what we are trying to recover more deeply in parish life as we renew sacramental preparation here at St Mary's, St John Bosco, and St Edward's.

Because the sacraments are not ceremonies to complete.

They are part of how souls come to know Jesus Christ truly.

And today Jesus says:

“This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Sacraments are encounters with Christ.

And encounters with Christ require readiness. Not perfection. But readiness.

One of the difficulties with a fixed programme model is that everyone begins together, and so naturally everyone expects to finish together.

A whole group starts in September, so everyone assumes:

“We all receive together in June.” But grace does not work like that.

One child may already show deep reverence, prayerfulness, and desire for the Eucharist.

Another may still be learning who Jesus is.

One family may already be rooted in Sunday Mass.

Another may still be slowly rediscovering the Faith.

And that is not failure. It is simply reality. Souls grow differently.

Every good parent already understands this naturally.

Children do not all mature at the same pace.

One child speaks early. Another later. One learns confidence quickly. Another needs gentleness and patience.

And spiritual growth is often the same.

The Church is not comparing people to one another. She is trying to help each soul grow toward Christ personally.

But here is the deeper difficulty.

If a fixed programme is already moving publicly toward a big group celebration, then what happens if, after prayerful discernment, it seems a child may need more time?

Suddenly everything becomes emotionally difficult.

Parents can feel embarrassed.

Children can feel singled out.

Catechists can feel pressured to just let them through.

And instead of discernment happening peacefully and pastorally, it becomes public and tense.

Almost as though delaying a sacrament is a punishment.

But it is not a punishment. It is pastoral care.

Because the Church's first concern must always be the salvation of souls.

That is the highest law of the Church.

And perhaps it is important to say clearly why we are changing our sacramental preparation. It follows the direction given at the clergy conference of 2025 and is closer to the apostolic model of the Church. In many ways, it will allow families to grow more peacefully and naturally in faith.

The goal is to help people live the sacramental life more deeply.

And this is not because we are ungrateful for what has gone before. Many faithful priests, catechists, parents, and parishioners have handed on the Faith generously for years, and we thank God for them.

But the world has changed.

Many children now grow up in a culture that barely knows God at all.

And so the Church must accompany people more intentionally and personally.

Because if sacramental preparation simply becomes:

“Complete the sessions, finish the programme, receive the sacrament,”

then people can begin to think of the sacraments as rewards for completing a process or reaching a milestone.

But sacraments are not badges of achievement.

They are living encounters with Jesus Christ.

And because they are real, readiness matters.

If a couple came for marriage preparation, but it became clear that one of them was deeply unsure or not truly ready, the Church would not simply carry on as though nothing mattered. Nobody would think it loving to force someone into marriage simply because the preparation had been completed and the family expected it.

And in a different way, the Church must also be careful never to treat First Holy Communion or Confirmation as things people simply “go through” regardless of whether faith is truly awakening in the soul.

Holy Communion is not a reward for finishing sessions.

It is receiving Christ Himself.

The same Lord worshipped by the angels.

The same Lord crucified and risen.

The same Lord truly present upon the altar.

And therefore the Church must ask carefully and lovingly:

Is this child ready to receive Our Lord with faith, reverence, and understanding appropriate to their age?

And this is not only about helping souls receive grace fruitfully.

It is also about protecting the sacraments from being received casually or without reverence — what the Church calls sacrilege.

That word sounds strong to modern ears, but the Church uses it because sacred things are truly sacred.

The Eucharist is not ordinary bread.

It is the Body and Blood of Christ.

And St Paul warns that receiving unworthily can harm the soul rather than heal it.

The Church therefore has a duty not only to welcome souls lovingly, but also to guard the holiness of the sacraments reverently.

Because sacred things should never become casual things.

And the same principle applies beyond First Holy Communion.

It applies to Confirmation too.

Confirmation is not “Catholic graduation.”

It is not: “You’ve reached a certain school year, therefore now you should be confirmed.”

Confirmation is Pentecost entering personally into a soul.

The strengthening of the Holy Spirit for witness and mission.

And some young people are spiritually hungry and ready early.

Others may need more time, more prayer, more conversion, more grounding in Mass and the life of the Church.

The same is true with Baptism.

Some parents come asking for Baptism while still unsure about the Faith themselves. And the Church does not reject them.

But she also does not pretend that Baptism is merely a naming ceremony or social tradition.

Baptism is rebirth into divine life.

And so sometimes the parish must gently walk with families first, helping faith begin to awaken before the sacrament is celebrated fully and fruitfully.

And the same is true for RCIA and adult reception into the Church.

Some adults arrive already deeply formed and ready quite quickly.

Others carry years of confusion, wounds, questions, or brokenness.

And that is perfectly alright.

Because conversion is not a production line.

The Church is not trying to process people efficiently.

She is trying to help souls encounter Christ truly and be saved.

And this happens through ordinary faithful Catholics walking alongside one another.

Parents teaching children to pray.

Parishioners welcoming families gently.

Mentors giving their time generously.

People sitting beside one another at Mass week after week.

Often faith grows quietly through friendship, encouragement, example, and prayer.

That is what a parish is meant to be:

not a place people pass through anonymously,
but a community helping one another toward heaven.

That is the goal.

Not simply getting people through programmes.

But helping souls remain close to Christ long afterwards.

And perhaps for some people tonight, this renewal is also an invitation.

An invitation to begin again.

Some parents may feel: "I do not know enough."

That is alright.

You do not need to arrive already perfect.

The Church wants to walk with you.

Some may not have been to Confession for many years. Come back.

Some may feel drawn toward Confirmation, or toward becoming Catholic, but have been hesitant or unsure.

Come and speak to us.

Some may simply feel that faith has grown distant and they want to begin praying again.

Begin now.

Because the Church is not a place only for those who already have everything together.

She is a mother helping souls toward Christ.

And the sacraments are not rewards for the perfect.

They are gifts of grace for those who are willing to keep walking toward God.

Because the tragedy would not be delaying a sacrament slightly.

The tragedy would be receiving sacraments without faith taking root and then quietly drifting away afterwards.

Or worse still, receiving holy things casually, without understanding, without repentance, without reverence.

And this is why Sunday Mass becomes central.

Not as a bureaucratic requirement.

But because faith is handed on not only by lessons, but by example.

Children learn reverence by kneeling beside praying parents.

Young people learn seriousness by seeing adults go to Confession.

Adults entering the Church learn Catholic life not only from lessons but from praying with the parish community.

The deepest catechesis is often lived before it is explained.

And that is why parents remain the first teachers of their children in the Faith.

Especially for First Confession and First Holy Communion.

The parish will help.

Mentors will help.

We will provide guidance, support, and practical tools to help parents teach and pray with their children at home.

But no programme can replace the witness of a mother and father, an aunt or uncle, a brother or sister, trying to live the faith sincerely.

A child who learns to pray beside their parents receives something far deeper than information alone.

And there is something profoundly hopeful in this renewal.

Because it allows the Church to act more like a mother and less like an institution processing people through stages.

Listening.

Accompanying.

Praying.

Walking patiently with souls.

Just as Christ Himself did.

The apostles today wait prayerfully for Pentecost.

Not rushing grace. Not forcing outcomes.

And perhaps we as a parish are being invited into that same patience and trust.

Because the Holy Spirit truly works in souls.

At different times.

In different ways.

At different speeds.

But always toward Christ.

Our task is not simply to prepare people for sacramental days.

Our task is to help prepare souls for heaven.

And that changes everything.

The sacraments are not milestones to complete.

They are encounters with the living Jesus Christ, given for the salvation of souls.