

## The Catechist: What Is Spirituality?

### Introduction

Spirituality is not really mysterious. Basically it is a way of being in relationship with God, ourselves and other human beings. This segment is meant to help you reflect on spirituality and Christian Spirituality in general. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the *first question*. Watch both videos. Then read the article “Catholic Sacramental Spirituality” and jot down your responses to the *reflection questions*.

### First Question

- What does the word spirituality mean to you?

### Videos

- Watch the videos *What Is Spirituality?* and *What Is Christian Spirituality?*
- Which of the two presentations helped you more?
- In what ways do you experience yourself acting with the mind of Christ?
- What would you add or change about your response to the first question after watching these videos?

## Article: Catholic Spirituality

*“The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil. Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?”* (from “God’s Grandeur” by Gerard Manley Hopkins)

If you went searching for Catholic poets and all you could research were their actual poetry—no biographies, no information posted on the Internet, no interviews—you might read “God’s Grandeur” and conclude that the author is Catholic. You would be correct. His poetry exhibits a Catholic sacramental spirituality that springs from his deep conviction and from his rich experience in the visible presence of the invisible God. He writes about a tangible presence both natural and human, with the most prominent sign being the human-enfleshed presence of God in Jesus Christ.

What makes Catholics Catholic? Most likely there are different answers to that question, but let’s just consider one here. One of the most fundamental and constitutive components of Catholic identity is that Catholics have a sacramental imagination and spirituality that shapes every generation, regardless of how we might do sacraments in any given time or situation. This so because how we do sacraments always involves us in the story of a loving God who saves, rescues, and transforms us by mingling with us. God is never absent. God “permeates”: in our families, in our friends and in our enemies, in our neighborhood and in the larger world, in the poor and in the oppressed and in those who are privileged.

The presence of God, the Incarnation, and the Redemption are doctrines and mysteries we cannot get our arms or minds or words around. They are bigger than we are, as humans. In sacraments, we

express these basic beliefs in song, sign, and symbol, ritual, gesture, and word. Together they shape a sacramental imagination and spirituality that cause people to come to the realization “I am Catholic in my bones.”

A sacramental imagination and spirituality is practiced and celebrated more than it is learned in a book, although it could be that words and stories in books will lead us to reflect and have an “aha!” experience about how God permeates our lives or the life of the world. A sacramental imagination develops over time as a result of doing sacraments and sacramental things.

Here are some suggestions for developing a Catholic spirituality of sacramentality by paying attention to the visible signs:

- Meditate on the primary symbols of water, oil, bread and wine, and the cross. Reflect on your basic daily use of these symbols and how that use relates or enhances the sacramental meaning for you. Recall stories from your lived experience that involve water, oil, bread and wine, and the cross. Ask yourself, “What do they tell me about God’s action and presence in my life and the lives of others?”
- Meditate on the primary rituals of assembling, processing, signing, blessing, being anointed, being absolved. Think about instances other than Church when you do or observe these kinds of rituals. How do they connect to your understanding or experience of sacraments? Ask yourself what they tell you about God’s action and presence in your life.
- Practice paying attention to the sense of how God “permeates” your life. Journal about it.

## Reflection Questions

- How does the phrase “the most prominent sign being the human-enfleshed presence of God in Jesus Christ” help you understand your own spirituality?
- In what ways do you feel you are “Catholic in your bones”?