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WHAT IS MEANT BY THE SACRAMENTS?

The sacraments are religious sign or symbol, associated with Christian churches, in which a sacred or spiritual power is believed to be transmitted through material elements viewed as channels of divine grace. They are considered essential to prepare and purify the soul for heaven and could only be administered by a member of the clergy. In Everyman Five-Wits's speech regarding the priesthood highlights the necessity of priests as God's actors on earth for the salvation of the mortal soul. However, it is important to note that Everyman's advocate before God is his good works on Earth, which is ultimately required for his salvation. They are the criteria on which Everyman will be judged. The presentation of the character of Good-Deeds illustrates an important point with regard to the concept of salvation presented in the play. Good-Deeds will plead Everyman's case before God, but without the Church's intervention (Confession), she is too weighed down by his sin to make the journey. Within the spiritual world in which Everyman was written, both a virtuous life and the sacraments, in tandem, were considered necessary for salvation. By the time of the play, faith in Jesus was codified into these seven distinct sacraments, administered by the church. Any given person could achieve six of them within their life. The sacraments were:

- Baptism, a ritual immersion in water. In early Christianity, baptism had been reserved for adult converts. However, in medieval Christianity it was performed on infants as early as possible to avoid children dying before it was administered. Baptism was seen as a covenant with the church.
- Confirmation, which was the acceptance of the worshiper into the church. In the middle ages, confirmation was often performed early, sometimes in conjunction with baptism. This rite often involved unction, or the application of holy oil.
- Communion, also known as the Eucharist or the Lord's supper, in which a priest performed a ritual echoing Jesus distributing bread and wine to his disciples before his crucifixion and telling them to eat it, as it was his body and blood respectively. Church doctrine at the time Everyman was written held that God granted priests the power to literally transform an offering of bread and wine, a miracle known as transubstantiation. This is referenced in the play.
- Confession and penance. In confession a worshiper would privately confess to a priest the ways in which they had fallen short of the Christian ideal life. The priest would absolve the worshiper's sins and assign appropriate penance. The

Church required confession and penance at least once a year for every adult Christian. Depending on the seriousness of the sins and the means of the worshiper, penances assigned in the medieval period could take a variety of forms. These included

- The recitation of specific prayers.
- Self-administered physical punishments.
- Monetary payments to the Church.
- Pilgrimage to holy sites (especially the holy city of Jerusalem).
- Participation in the Crusades (religious wars to conquer and hold Jerusalem).
- Ordination into the priesthood. Because it was required for priests to be celibate, this sacrament precluded marriage and vice versa.
- Marriage. Christian doctrine viewed marriage as a mirror of Jesus's relationship with the church, and divorce was forbidden except in cases of adultery.
- Extreme unction, or the anointing of the sick. Colloquially known as "last rites," extreme unction was accepted as a sacrament in the 8th and 9th centuries. It granted a final blessing and absolution to those near death.