

A Catholic College Student's Spiritual Survival Guide

*Catholic prayers and teachings for maintaining
your faith in college*

Revised Edition

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If you will give these instructions to the brothers,
you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus,
nourished on the words of the faith
and of the sound teaching you have followed.

Avoid profane and silly myths.
Train yourself for devotion,

for, while physical training is of limited value,
devotion is valuable in every respect,
since it holds a promise of life
both for the present and for the future.

This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance.

For this we toil and struggle,
because we have set our hope on the living God,
who is the savior of all,
especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things.

Let no one have contempt for your youth,
but set an example for those who believe,
in speech,
conduct,
love,
faith,
and purity.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to college! We in Catholic campus ministry would like to welcome you to the Catholic community on campus, and to wish you all the blessings God wants to give you while you are at college.

Life in college is a lot different from high school. More exciting adventures, greater challenges. You're living away from home for the first time and having to deal with roommates. You have to make it to class on time, and on your own. And get your assignments done.

Then there is the excitement of going to parties, talking with friends long into the night, figuring out what you're going to do with your life. Or just what you are going to do on the weekend.

Sounds great, huh? Well it is. But there are challenges, too. In order to make the most of the opportunities and the incredible freedom which you'll have in college, you need to discover who you are, what kind of person you want to be, and what is most important in life.

The Catholic Church believes that following Jesus Christ is the most important thing a person can do anywhere. This is especially true in college. This is why the Church establishes and continues to support Catholic Campus Ministry. And this is also why the local church, your own diocese or archdiocese established and maintains Catholic campus ministry centers.

Following Jesus Christ is the most important thing a person can do anywhere. This is especially true in college.

At these centers you can find other students who are also trying to follow Christ as Catholics. As part of such a community, you can grow in your relationship with Him and deepen your understanding of the Truth of His Gospel. You can put your faith into practice by caring for the hurt and needy as Christ did. You can discover the person Jesus calls you to be and the special plan He has for you to become perfect as a child of God, an image of the Eternal Son of the Father (see *Romans* 8:29). This little book is intended to give some resources to help you strengthen and sustain your relationship with Christ through the Catholic Church He founded.

PART I – PRAYER

The single most important thing you can do to have a successful time in college is to pray. There are a lot of things you should do: make new friends, become familiar with the campus and the city it is in, buy books, have fun. Making it to class every day and studying are definitely important.

But taking time every day to pray, to talk with God and seek His will in your life, is the one thing that will contribute to all of the others, and keep the others in balance.

You probably don't need much encouragement to pray before a big exam; praying in a situation like that comes easy. But, if that is the only time you've talked to God the whole semester, you haven't given Him much of a chance to help you. And you certainly haven't given Him the love and respect He deserves from you always.

So, if you want to make the most of your time in college, the first step is to work to maintain and deepen your relationship with God through prayer.

An essential and indispensable part of your prayer life has to include Sunday Mass. Being part of the Church, the community Christ founded, means getting together with and as that community at least once a week. We do this at Mass, the most perfect form of prayer because it is centered on Jesus' own prayer and sacrifice to the Father, the Holy Eucharist.

In addition to this common prayer of ours as the Church, you to need nurture and care for your spiritual life through personal prayer, too.

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| <p>Prayer is an intimate sharing between friends... taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.</p> |
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WHAT IS PRAYER?

Sometimes people don't pray on their own because they are not sure what they're supposed to do, or what prayer actually is. St. Theresa of Avila gives one of the best definitions of prayer there is. She says prayer is "an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us."

This definition is great because it says that prayer isn't something exotic and mysterious. Prayer is a meeting with God, as with a friend: hanging out with God, as it were. It is based on the assumption that God is a friend, someone you know loves you, and who wants to spend time with you.

Your relationship with God is a lot like your relationships with your other friends. They would think you weren't really spending time with them if you were always talking to someone else or your attention was somewhere else when you were supposedly talking to them. In the same way, your time in prayer, your meeting with God, has to be devoted exclusively to talking with Him. It's great if you include Him in the other aspects of your life. But you still need to take time alone with Him, just to talk with Him. And to listen to what He has to tell you.

When the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) discusses prayer, it emphasizes God's desire to be with us, and to give Himself to us in prayer. The Catechism recalls the encounter Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well (*John* 4:10). Jesus is on His way back to Galilee and has been walking all morning. He's hot and tired and thirsty. He stops at a well by the road and asks a woman there for a drink.

At first, the woman tells Jesus that He shouldn't be asking anything of her, that she has nothing He should want. We can be like that in prayer. We think, *God knows what we need. We don't need to tell Him; He can figure it out Himself. God is perfect; He shouldn't want anything of us.* But He does. He wants us to meet Him in prayer.

Jesus replies to the woman, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and He would have given you living water." Later, He says, "whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." As the Catechism says,

The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is He who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. (CCC 2560)

Prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.

In order to receive the spring welling to eternal life, we have to go and meet Jesus where He is, and offer Him what He asks for. We have to make ourselves available to Him in prayer, give ourselves to Him because He asks us to. And when we do, He gives Himself to us “welling to eternal life.”

Luckily, we do not go to God in prayer alone. Just as He thirsts for us to thirst for Him, so He gives us help in order to come to the fountain of prayer. As St. Paul tells us,

The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.

The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will. (*Romans* 8: 26-27).

Since we have received the Holy Spirit in Baptism, He dwells in us, and helps us to pray, giving expression to what is beyond us. He is there to help us pray so we can receive the blessings He wants to give us. We just need to learn to cooperate with His graces and make ourselves available to Him by taking time, every day, to be alone with Him in prayer.

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

One of the best ways which God has given us for talking with Him is through His written word, the Sacred Scriptures (i.e., the Bible). The Catholic Church has always encouraged Christians to read the Bible. As the Second Vatican Council declared in 1965,

in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life.

[The Church encourages] all the Christian faithful . . . to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the ‘excellent knowledge of

Jesus Christ' (*Phiippians* 3:8). 'For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ' (St. Jerome). Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading.

. . . And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for 'we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read His divine words' (St. Ambrose).

In praying with Sacred Scripture, God and man talk together; for we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read His divine words.

The Scriptures not only tell us about God. Through them, God Himself speaks to us, and we come to know God. We don't just know about Him, but get to know God Himself. We become familiar with who He is, how much He loves us and what He wants for us and from us, in order for us be happy. To read the Scriptures prayerfully is probably the best way to grow closer to God, and the most fruitful way of spending time with Him.

DAILY PRAYERS

In addition to reading the Bible, there are other ways you can pray. For instance, "saying prayers." It is a longstanding practice for Catholics who are serious about their relationship with God to pray using set forms of words that have been handed down for generations.

This way of praying has the advantage of expressing our thoughts and concerns without us worrying about finding the right words to say. If you are already uncomfortable with private prayer, using traditional prayers can save you from further anxiety about what to say. You can't really say the wrong thing to God if you are sincere and want to spend time with Him. But, worrying about what to say may make it harder to take the time necessary for prayer.

Also, using traditional prayers helps us to unite our voices together in the common prayers we all know. By praying with these traditional prayers, we are following the example of Jesus who gave His disciples the model of Christian prayer: the Our Father.

Some say that praying in this way is formulaic and empty and that real prayer should be spontaneous. But praying in these traditional forms can be quite heartfelt. Any form of words (e.g., “I love you”) can be either heartfelt or empty. It’s not the words; it’s the intention of the person using them that makes the words meaningful.

If using traditional prayers helps you to pray, then use them. If they seem hollow and empty, pray to God in words you make up. But above all, pray! Don’t let your distaste for these prayers be an excuse to neglect talking to God and fostering a relationship with the One who you most need to talk to in college.

Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed by thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace.
The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day He rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

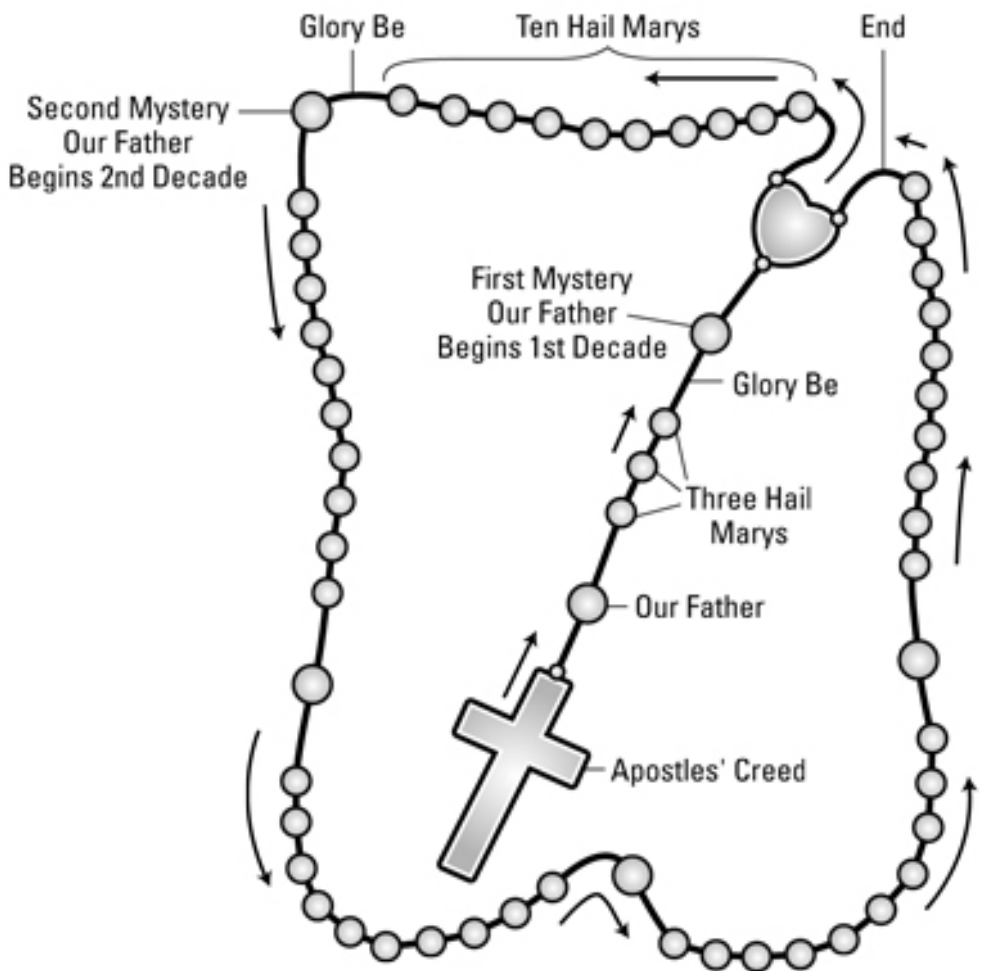
Hail Holy Queen

Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our life, our sweetness, and our hope.
To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
To you do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,
your eyes of mercy toward us.
And after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.
O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary.

O My Jesus

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins.
Save us from the fires of hell.
Lead all souls to heaven,
especially those in most need of your mercy.

How to Pray the Rosary



The purpose of the Rosary is to meditate on certain principal events in the history of our salvation and to thank and praise God for them. There are twenty mysteries meditated upon in the Rosary and these are divided into four sets of five mysteries each.

Joyful Mysteries

The Annunciation of Jesus' Birth by the Angel Gabriel
The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
The Birth of our Lord
The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple

Luminous Mysteries

The Baptism of the Lord
The Wedding Feast at Cana
The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
The Transfiguration
The Institution of the Eucharist

Sorrowful Mysteries

The Agony in the Garden
The Scourging at the Pillar
The Crowning with Thorns
The Carrying of the Cross
The Crucifixion

Glorious Mysteries

The Resurrection of Jesus
The Ascension of Jesus
The Descent of the Holy Spirit on Mary and the Apostles
The Assumption of Mary
The Coronation of Mary

Concluding Prayers

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.
– That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: O God, whose Only Begotten Son, by His life, death and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, grant, we beseech Thee, that meditating upon these mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise. Through the same Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to your protection,
implored your help
or sought your intercession
was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence, I fly to you,
O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions,
but in your mercy, hear and answer me. Amen.

Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe
that you are one God in three divine Persons,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
I believe that your divine Son
became man and died for our sins,
and that He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe these and all the truths
which the Holy Catholic Church teaches,
because you revealed them,
who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Act of Hope

O my God,
relying on your infinite goodness and promises,
I hope to obtain pardon for my sins,
the help of your grace,
and life everlasting,
through the merits of Jesus Christ,
my Lord and Redeemer.

Act of Love

O my God, I love you above all things,
with my whole heart and soul,
because you are all worthy
and deserving of all my love.
I love my neighbor as myself
for the love of you.
I forgive all who have injured me
and I ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

Act of Sorrow (Contrition)

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance,
to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In His name, my God, have mercy.

Or

O my God, I am heartily sorry
for having offended you,
and I detest all my sins
because of your just punishment,
but most of all, because they offend you, my God,
who are all good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace,
to sin no more, and to avoid
the near occasions of sin. Amen.

Or

Any spontaneous prayer that tells God you are sorry, that you will mend your ways and avoid what leads to sin is a good act of contrition.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful,
and enkindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your spirit and they shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray:
O God, you have instructed the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit.
Grant that through the same Holy Spirit
we may always be truly wise
and rejoice in His consolation.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Morning Offering

Most Holy and adorable Trinity,
one God in three Persons,
I praise you and give you thanks
for all the favors you have bestowed on me.
Your goodness has preserved me until now.

I offer you my whole being
and in particular all my thoughts, words, and deeds,
together with all the trials I may undergo this day.
Give them your blessing.
May your divine love animate them
and may they serve your greater glory.

I make this morning offering
in union with the divine intentions of Jesus Christ
who offers Himself daily in the holy sacrifice of the Mass,
and in union with Mary, His Virgin Mother and our Mother,
who was always the faithful handmaid of the Lord. Amen.

Or

Almighty God, I thank you for your past blessings.
Today I offer myself - whatever I do, say, or think -
to your loving care. Continue to bless me, Lord.
I make this morning offering
in union with the divine intentions of Jesus Christ
who offers Himself daily in the holy sacrifice of the Mass,
and in union with Mary, His Virgin Mother and our Mother,
who was always the faithful handmaid of the Lord. Amen.

Night Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have given your followers
an example of gentleness and humility,
a task that is easy, a burden that is light.
Accept the prayers and work of this day,
and give us the rest that will strengthen us
to render more faithful service to you
who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

PRAYERS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

Prayer to St. Joseph of Cupertino for Students

O humble Saint Joseph of Cupertino,
singularly favored by God in the difficulties of study
and the worries of examinations,
implore the holy Spirit to enlighten my mind
and aid my memory in the search of His truth and wisdom.
Help me especially
in the decisive moments of examination,
protecting me from that forgetfulness
and disturbing anxiety which often accompany them,
so that I may grow in knowledge,
love and service of God
from whom flows that wisdom
which leads to eternal life. Amen.

Prayer before Study of St. Thomas Aquinas

Ineffable Creator, Who, from the treasures of Your wisdom
have established three hierarchies of angels,
have arrayed them in marvelous order above the fiery heavens,
and have marshaled the regions of the universe
with such artful skill,
You are proclaimed the true font of light and wisdom,
and the primal origin raised high beyond all things.
Pour forth a ray of Your brightness
into the darkened places of my mind;
disperse from my soul the twofold darkness
into which I was born: sin and ignorance.
You make eloquent the tongue of infants.
Refine my speech and pour forth upon my lips
the goodness of Your blessing.
Grant to me keenness of mind, capacity to remember,
skill in learning, subtlety to interpret,
and eloquence in speech.
May You guide the beginning of my work,
direct its progress, and bring it to completion.
You Who are true God and True Man.
Who live and reign, world without end. Amen.

Prayer of Thomas Merton

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this
you will lead me by the right road
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore, will I trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Cardinal Henry Newman Meditation

God has created me to do Him some definite service: He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission - I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good - I shall do His work - I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling. Therefore, I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends; He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me - still He knows what He is about.

Jeremiah 29: 11-14

I know well the plans
I have in mind for you, says the LORD,
plans for your welfare, not for woe!
Plans to give you a future full of hope.
When you call me, when you go to pray to me,
I will listen to you.
When you look for me, you will find me.
Yes, when you seek me with all your heart,
you will find me with you, says the LORD,
and I will change your lot;

I will gather you together from all the nations
and all the places to which I have banished you,
says the LORD, and bring you back to the place
from which I have exiled you.

Isaiah 43: 1-3

But now, thus says the LORD,
who created you, O Jacob,
and formed you, O Israel:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name: you are mine.

When you pass through the water,
I will be with you;
in the rivers you shall not drown.
When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned;
the flames shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD, your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your savior.

Prayer for Vocations

God our Father, we entrust to you
the young men and women of the world,
with their problems, aspirations and hopes.
Look upon them with love
and make them workers for peace
and builders of a loving civilization.
Call them to follow Jesus, your Son.
Make them understand that to give one's whole life
for you and humanity is worthwhile.
Grant generosity in reply.
Listen, Lord, to our praise and prayers also
for the young people who,
after the example of Mary, Mother of the Church,
have believed in your word
and are preparing for Holy Orders,
profession of the Evangelical Counsels,
missionary work.
Help them understand that the call
which you made to them is ever real and urgent. Amen.

Prayer for Purity of St. Thomas Aquinas

Dearest Jesus!

I know well that every perfect gift,
and above all others that of chastity,
depends upon the most powerful assistance
of Your Providence,
and that without you a creature can do nothing.
Therefore, I pray that You to defend, with Your grace,
chastity and purity in my soul as well as in my body.
And if I have ever received through my senses
any impression that could stain my chastity and purity,
do You, Who is the Supreme Lord of all my powers,
take it from me, that I may with an immaculate heart
advance in your love and service,
offering myself chaste all the days of my life
on the most pure altar of Thy Divinity. Amen.

Prayer for the Addicted

God of mercy,
we bless you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ,
who ministered to all who came to Him.
Give your strength to (name of the person),
one of your children,
enfold him/her in your love and
restore him/her to the freedom of God's children.
Lord, look with compassion
on all those who have lost their health and freedom.
Restore to them the assurance of your unfailing mercy,
strengthen them in the work of recovery,
and help them to resist all temptation.
To those who care for them,
grant patience and understanding
and a love that perseveres.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Perseverance

O my God and my all,
for your glory, love and will,
for the Holy Church and Sacred Family,
and for Your own Blessed Trinity,
grant all of us the special grace
of perseverance to the very end.
Establish and keep us in perfect charity
and holy humility,
in a complete obedience of mind, heart and life.
Let us be always aware of
and cooperative with your gifts
following the means recommended
by the ascetical teaching
and prompt us to avail ourselves
of all the divine opportunities
which are afforded to us through our crucified Lord
present in the Blessed Sacrament. Amen!

Prayer in Time of Distress

Lord, I'm in need of someone to give me a hand and save me and here you are with your hands both nailed to a board. I'm looking for somebody to walk with me and I see your feet fastened to a cross. I'm searching for a friend to claim me as His own and I find you with a bleeding heart. I'm looking for life and I find myself in the presence of a man who is dead. Where shall I go for help, my God made man?

When Easter bells are ringing they tell me you died out of love and only for three days.... then you rose to be my life and strength. I beg you my crucified and risen Savior free me from selfishness and fear to commit myself to justice. Spare me from envy and worries. Save me from resentment against those who don't love or accept me. Don't allow me to become callous to the suffering of others and to look only for my own comfort. Free me from the boredom of my routine work and from a life without meaning. Lord Jesus, loosen my bonds through your cross and give me strength and courage through your resurrection. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

Prayer to St. Joseph

O blessed Saint Joseph,
faithful guardian and protector of virgins,
to whom God entrusted Jesus and Mary,
I implore you by the love which you did bear them,
to preserve me from every defilement of soul and body,
that I may always serve them
in holiness and purity of love. Amen.

Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael, the Archangel,
defend us in the day of battle.
Be our safeguard against the wickedness
and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do you, O Prince of the heavenly host,
by the power of God, cast into hell Satan
and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world
seeking the ruin and destruction of souls. Amen.

Breastplate of St. Patrick

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and console me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Peace Prayer of St. Francis

Lord make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is
despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; And where there is
sadness, Joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek To be consoled, as
to console; To be understood, as to understand; To be loved, as to
love. For it is in giving that we receive, It is in pardoning that we are
pardoned, And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Canticle of Brother Sun of St. Francis

Most High Almighty Good Lord, Yours are praise, glory, honor and
all blessings; To You alone! Most High, do they belong, and no man
is worthy of speaking Your Name! Be praised, Lord, with all Your
creatures, and above all our Brother Sun, who gives us the day by
which You light our way, and who is beautiful, radiant and with his
great splendor is a symbol to us of You, O Most High! And be
praised, Lord, for our Sister Moon and the Stars. You created them in
the heavens bright, precious and beautiful! And be praised, Lord, for
our Brother the Wind and for the air and the clouds and for fair
weather and for all other through which You sustain Your creatures.

And be praised, Lord, for our Sister Water, so useful, and humble, and
chaste! And be praised, my Lord, for our Brother Fire, through whom
You light up the night and who is handsome, joyful, robust, and
strong! And be praised, my Lord, for our Sister, Mother Earth, who
supports and carries us and produces the diverse fruits and colorful
flowers and trees! Praise and bless the Lord and give thanks to Him
and serve Him with great humility! Be praised, my Lord, for our
Sister, bodily Death from whom no living man can escape! Woe only
to those who die in mortal sin; but blessed are those who have done
Your most holy will; for the second death can cause them no harm!

PART II – THE CATHOLIC FAITH

INTRODUCTION

It may not seem like it to you now, but your Catholic Christian faith is the most valuable gift you have been given. Some Catholics may not even be able to really say why they are Catholic. Maybe they were raised Catholic, and have just always been Catholic. Their parents were, as their grandparents before them were. So they are, too.

But by the gift of your Catholic faith, you are given a new life, a share in God's own life, a fullness of life that has begun already and is meant to continue without end. Hopefully you have learned for yourself that living Christ's life gives the peace and fulfillment, even in the face of hardship, that every human heart longs for.

In college, you'll find no shortage of things to challenge how you really live out your faith. It might be the apparent "need" to cheat on a test, to trade real love and intimacy, along with your own (and another person's) dignity, for the cheap thrill of mere sex. You'll just as surely have the chance to use and abuse drugs and alcohol. Your ability to face these moral challenges will demonstrate and form the kind of person you are and want to be.

Other challenges are not so much moral as intellectual. They might be in the form of someone telling you (or you just wondering for yourself) that the Catholic faith doesn't make sense. People often claim that Catholicism is an incoherent jumble of rules and empty dogmas.

You might hear this from a friend who says that a good and loving God would not permit all the suffering there is in the world. Or a professor may tell you that we can't be sure of any truth. How can we be sure that God even exists or that Jesus is His Son?

Or your (non-Catholic) Christian friend might tell you that the rules and hierarchy of the Church are mere human inventions and traditions of men that stand in the way of a relationship with Christ.

In order to really be and remain a Catholic Christian, you have to stand up to moral and intellectual challenges like these. Or at least recover from the times you don't rise to the challenge. And this is not easy, especially in college.

So how do you stand up to the challenges to your faith, and what can you do to prepare for them? First, as was mentioned before, you need to pray. You need to take time to be with Him who you know loves you. You need to do this every day. By praying every day you grow closer to God in love, and grow in

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understanding who He is and what His will is for you. And the more you know Him and the more deeply you love Him, the more you will be able to see through the empty promises of those people and things which would ask you to give up your faith for their sake.

Next, realize that deepening your understanding of God is not easy. If it is difficult to understand creation through physics, biology or history, how much more so the Creator.

It is just simplistic to expect God to be easily grasped and perfectly intelligible to human minds: His ways are not our ways. However, much God wishes to be known and loved, He still infinitely surpasses our ability to completely comprehend Him. Even Jesus's own disciples had a hard time getting His message. "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me?" (*John* 14:9) That is why He promised to send the Holy Spirit.

I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming (*John* 16: 12-15).

Jesus knew that in the ages that would follow, very many people would misunderstand the message of the Gospel, but He would not allow the Church He founded ever to stray from the truth He revealed and left to their care.

In spite of our limitations and weaknesses, and really because of them, God does speak to His people, and expects us to know and love Him. But the point is, it's not easy. This is why He has given us in His Church various aids to help us grasp and hold on to the Truth, and to live this Truth in His grace.

All of the structure and formality of the Catholic Church exists ultimately for this reason: to lead all people (everywhere, now, and in the future) to God. The

Church exists to preach to all people the truth of salvation available in Jesus Christ, to offer the grace from God necessary to live out this truth, and to safeguard and pass on to future generations the truth and teaching that Jesus has entrusted to the Church's care. We have Jesus' promise to remain with us until the end of time, and as just mentioned, His gift of the Holy Spirit who would reveal all things.

The Catholic Church exists to preach the truth of salvation available in Jesus Christ and to offer the grace from God necessary to live out this truth.

The purpose of this little book is to present the core truths of the Catholic faith, and show, as much as possible, where they are referred to in Scripture. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is also cited at times to show an official presentation of the point being discussed. It is not meant to be a complete or thorough presentation of what Catholics believe. For that you should consult the *Catechism* or one of the many resources on Catholic doctrine available through your Catholic campus ministry or parish.

This book is meant to help you respond to someone who might question you about your beliefs as a Catholic. Or just to answer questions that you yourself have. It is especially meant to help you reply to someone who doesn't realize how much of Catholic teaching is actually in the Bible, and to correct the misconception that all religious teaching has to be (or even is able to be) explicitly referred to in the Bible.

ARE CATHOLICS SAVED?

One common challenge to a person's Catholic faith comes in the form of a question, "Are you saved?" Many people, both Catholic and Protestant, are unclear how to answer this question. Since Catholics don't usually talk about themselves as "being saved," some, even life-long Catholics, can come to believe that Catholics are not saved. The truth is that one's salvation is more complicated than answering a "yes" or "no" question.

You should know that there is a lot of history behind this question. This is one of the issues over which the Protestant reformers split from the Catholic Church. The basic difference is over what, if anything, a person has to do to

be “saved”, and whether after being “saved” a person is able to do anything to lose his or her salvation.

Catholics believe that there is nothing we can do to earn salvation and yet we can refuse and so lose salvation.

As you will see below, some verses in the Bible say there is nothing we can do to earn the grace of salvation, and there are others that say we can refuse this grace, and so lose salvation. Catholics believe that both of these positions are true. Some Protestants think that because there is nothing we can do to deserve salvation, there is nothing we can do to lose it. “Once Saved, Always Saved.” Not all Protestants, however, take this extreme position.

Jesus Christ: Savior and Redeemer

At the core of the Catholic faith is the belief that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and so redeemed the whole human race. Catholics accept completely the teaching of the Apostle Paul:

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith (*Romans 3:21-26*).

Justification has been *merited for us by the Passion of Christ* who offered Himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, no. 1992).

Catholics believe that God offers every person forgiveness for their sins through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. We further believe that no one can do anything to deserve this forgiveness. Salvation is a completely free and gratuitous gift from God.

The Necessity of Faith

Catholics, like all Christians, believe that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation. As St. Paul tells us, salvation comes to us through faith. If you confess

with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. For scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame” (*Romans* 10:9-11).

Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation. Since ‘without faith it is impossible to please [God]’ (*Hebrews* 11:6) and to attain to the fellowship of his sons, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life ‘But he who endures to the end’ (*Matthew* 10:22) (CCC 161).

Moreover, we cannot do anything to deserve or earn having faith in Jesus. Faith itself is a grace, a free gift from God. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast (*Ephesians* 2:8).

No one can do anything to deserve the forgiveness that God offers through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. Salvation is a completely free and gratuitous gift from God.

A Christian is able to believe in Jesus as an effect of this free gift of God. It is only God’s grace which allows us to accept this gift. “Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion” (CCC 2010).

God offers the grace to believe in Him and we respond and cooperate with His action in our life. One major difference between Catholics and other Christians centers around what “salvation” actually means.

What Exactly Is Salvation?

While Catholics along with all Christians confidently proclaim that “Jesus saves,” what this means is often understood negatively: Jesus saves us from sin, death and, ultimately, hell. Implicit in this, of course, is that salvation consists in life, even eternal life. Non-Catholic understandings of the Gospel often give little positive content about what the nature of eternal life is. This is not because

the Scriptures do not offer us a positive understanding of salvation and the life of the saints in Heaven (for, as we will see below, they do). Rather it is because Protestantism views salvation primarily in terms of God's sovereign will to 'save' sinners who do not, and cannot, merit such mercy. The only criterion and rationale for a sinner not receiving the eternal punishment he or she deserves is the (ultimately unintelligible, nay arbitrary) will of God mercifully to grant the sinner eternal life in heaven. Likewise, this way of viewing salvation also tends to view Christ's atoning sacrifice in a very (arbitrarily) legalistic manner called "penal substitution," which will be explained later in this little work.

Being thoroughly based on the Bible, the Catholic understanding of salvation, on the other hand, is ultimately grounded in the belief that God reveals His own inner, intrinsic nature, that we can come to have some intelligible grasp of it (though not complete by any means), and most marvelously, we can actually come to share in this nature, becoming adopted sons and daughters. This is what Catholics mean by calling some people saints; they are the Christians who have attained complete and perfect salvation in heaven. This understanding, too, is attested to in Scripture.

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One way Scripture uses "saints" or "holy ones" is to refer to fellow living Christians (*Romans* 1:7, *1 Corinthians* 14:33). This is especially true when Saint Paul refers to the 'saints' in Jerusalem whose financial support he asks his audience to contribute to (*1 Corinthians* 16:1-3). But Scripture also says that the saints in heaven are connected to us, being integral to what is attractive about the salvation found in Jesus Christ and the Church, something that is contrasted with a frightening, threatening God of wrath and vengeance.

You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them. . . . No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. (*Hebrews* 12:18-19, 22-24)

The *Book of Revelation* especially talks about Christians who are already in Heaven:

After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.

These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (*Revelation* 7:9,14-17)

This depiction includes much symbolic language: 'white robes' refers to a purification the saint received because of the 'blood of the Lamb,' Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, and they hold 'palm branches' as a sign of their victory. As a result of this victory and purity, won through Jesus, they are given life and are freed from hunger, thirst, sorrow, and hardship. But the precise nature of the victory, and its relationship to purity is not spelled out.

Jesus, especially, speaks of the salvation he offers in terms of eternal life, but it depends on knowing and believing in Him.

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day. (*John* 6:40)

Jesus says the salvation he offers is eternal life, but it depends on knowing and believing in Him.

Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. (*John* 17:3)

God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever possesses the Son has life; whoever does not possess the Son of God does not have life. (1 *John* 5:11-12)

Indeed, throughout the New Testament, heaven, while a place of unending life and joy, is often spoken of in terms of mystery.

At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. (1 *Corinthians* 13:12)

See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure. (1 *John* 3:1-3)

Eternal life is knowing God and being known by Him which makes us like God and so requires moral purity.

So, while there is a mystery in what the eternal life of heaven will be, Scripture is clear that it involves knowing God in a way He knows us. And furthermore, this knowing and being known will make us like God, and this will require moral purity. This connection between the saints in heaven extends to us here and now, and contributes, it would seem, to our own sanctification.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. (*Hebrews* 12:1-2)

So, the life that brings us into communion with the saints, the holy ones in heaven, is at once a life in which we are purified of sin through some effort of ours, yet also one through which Jesus perfects us through having faith in Him. As the Letter to the Hebrews continues, this comes about by God purifying us "in order that we may share his holiness . . . that holiness without which no one will see the Lord." (*Hebrews* 12:10, 14)

All these elements of eternal life come together if one understands the saints are the holy ones who share in the fullness of God's life in heaven by becoming the

completion of Jesus' saving mission. For they now manifest in themselves the true, intrinsic nature that God manifested in His Son by becoming one of us in Jesus. For as the Son of God shares in our human nature in Jesus, so through Him, Christians share in His divine nature, ultimately as saints in Heaven.

God has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world . . . (2 *Peter* 1:4)

But this divine nature is not unintelligible, and inaccessible, but rather the saints 'see' and 'know as they are known' and so share in it. And they have been brought to this glory precisely through the Son of God manifesting God's love and redeeming humanity. As Jesus says,

Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father. . . . So be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect (*teleios*). Matthew 5:44-45,48

The cross of Jesus manifests and shows forth the intrinsic nature of God, a God Who is Love.

For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. (*Mark* 10:45)

The cross of Jesus thus manifests and shows forth the true, intrinsic nature of God, a God Who is Love.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. (1 *John* 4:7-12)

Why Jesus Died on the Cross

This brings us to a crucial question, one that puzzles many Christians and non-Christians alike, and can block their acceptance of salvation in Jesus Christ.

“Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?” A common answer, though not really the Catholic answer, says that Jesus is a substitute victim, an innocent, and infinitely holy person, the Son of God, who suffers in place of them the punishment which sinners deserve, and thereby frees them from this just punishment they deserve; this is the “penal substitution” theory mentioned before. He thus allows them to receive a reward of eternal life they do not deserve. God the Father, being infinitely just, demands a sacrifice for sin, but also being infinitely merciful, sends His Son, Jesus, to offer the only sacrifice that could pay that infinite debt.

To many people skeptical of the Christian gospel, this makes no sense, and seems to show that God is cruel and arbitrary in dealing with offenses against Himself, as well as being abusive toward His Son. This seems anything but just. It is reasonably asked, could not God just forgive our offenses, as He asks us to do to those who offend us? As anyone might, in mercy, turn the other cheek, or cancel a debt owed to themselves, it seems God could simply not be offended by an offensive act, or at least forgive the offense.

And if God cannot simply cancel and forgive the injury to His infinite dignity, but satisfaction must be made for it, it is not clear how a third-party might provide the satisfaction for an offence committed by someone else. For, while one might justly pay for damage caused by another’s actions as when my father paid for a car window that I shot out with a bb gun, or a kind benefactor could pay a traffic fine or gambling debt for another, judicial, punitive sentences imposed on the person of wrongdoers due to their guilt, not the damage they cause, simply are not, in justice, transferable. A good and just God cannot just declare the responsible party not responsible, and the punishment stemming from this responsibility as having been satisfied by substituting one prisoner for another, just as nobody’s father can go to prison or be executed in the place of his son; that is just not just, even if the father is willing. To many a skeptic, it is unfathomable how it is supposed to be an act of justice for the innocent Son of God to bear the punishment of death in the place of disobedient human beings.

God could have forgiven and redeemed us in some other way than the cross unknown to us, but the cross of Christ is how God did choose to do it.

The Catholic position, as articulated by Saint Thomas Aquinas, contends that the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross was not strictly necessary. God could have forgiven and redeemed us in some other way unknown to us. But, the cross

of Christ is how God did choose to do it, and there are good reasons for Him choosing to do it in this manner.

To be sure, Catholics believe that Jesus did suffer for our sins, and by His suffering, we are redeemed. But the cross of Christ does this as manifesting God's love for us, as showing forth in a profound and supremely appropriate way the forgiveness God does wish to give freely, the forgiveness Jesus, the Son of God Himself offers from the cross. And further, Jesus' suffering and death redeems and sanctifies humanity, for by it He realizes in His own human nature perfect love and obedience to the Father, and He becomes the means by which all who have faith in Him can share in this perfect love and obedience.

In order to see how the cross is redemptive in a way that is not a substitutionary punishment, one needs to consider what we need redemption from. In his original plan for us, God made us for love, and not in just a human way, but as He loves, to share in His life in the Trinity of Love. That is heaven: loving God in the way God loves, and loving everything else God loves in the manner that He does: in the total self-giving willing of good for others. But we, the human race, are not capable of this kind of love on our own.

Moreover, we failed at the love we are capable of. This was the first, original sin of Adam and Eve, and from it, all of us have been infected so that none of us loves humanly as we should. So, we "all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (*Romans* 3:23). Humanity, then, was (and left to itself, is) an enemy of God. As enemies, none of us can do anything to make peace with God since the offence against God, who is infinitely good and holy, renders the offender incapable of goodness and holiness. God is willing to forgive every sin committed, but human beings (prior to being redeemed) are not capable being friends with God, of acting in obedience to Him. The only one who could make peace would be a man already at peace with God, who would do it on behalf of other humans. This Divine Mediator, the man Jesus Christ, does not just suffer what we should suffer. But His suffering is done in love, in perfect obedience to the Father, and so He does what no fallen human is capable of doing, since He is inherently good and holy (divine) yet also human (though not fallen).

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| <p>Jesus, as God made man, by His perfect obedience to the Father restores humanity to friendship with God.</p> |
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Left to ourselves, there is an infinite gulf between humanity and God, and it is a kind of debt and punishment, but it is made up for, not by an innocent third-party being punished in our place, but by God Himself, as a man, acting with the loving obedience all people ought to give to God. Jesus, the Eternal Son of the Father, and God-made-man, by His perfect obedience to the Father (an obedience unto death, death on a cross (*Philippians 2:8*)) restores humanity to friendship with God. And being God, He rightfully inherits a place in the Kingdom of his Father (i.e. heaven). Or put in terms of love, Jesus perfectly loves the Father and atones for the lovelessness of mankind, and being God, He is able to fulfill the purpose for which God made humanity: Jesus is able to love as God loves forever in heaven.

Jesus' obedience in accepting the cross is supremely an act of love, the most dramatic and revelatory act of the love that is God, which transforms the very sin which inflicts that cruelty and violence on Him. The Jewish leaders, the people of Jerusalem who reject Him, the Roman authorities who cynically use Him, the soldiers who beat and ridiculed Him, his disciples who deserted Him, all are manifestation of human sin: your sins, my sins. But Jesus accepted this rejection, abuse, isolation, betrayal, brutal violence and made from this our sin, His loving act. He, as it were, absorbs hate and sin with His infinite love and obedience, and thereby changes it. He makes the cross, an instrument of torture and execution, into a means of loving those who are torturing and executing him, a means of displaying for all the world and for all time how completely and profoundly God loves those whom He created. And without such terrible sin, God could not have manifested the depth of His forgiving love. He could and does forgive, but there is no forgiveness without sin to forgive, and the horror of the sin which nailed Jesus to the cross is fitting (if not strictly necessary) to manifest the sublimity of God's love and His wish for mankind to share in a life of that love forever (which is what heaven is).

The cross reconciles sinners to God, For those who accept what Jesus does on their behalf, in faith, are incorporated into Him and participate in His saving act.

And the cross not only manifests God's nature, but it redeems humanity and brings about our sharing in that nature. The cross reconciles sinners to God. For those who accept what Jesus does on their behalf, in faith, are incorporated into Him and participate in His saving act. His life of obedience to the Father becomes the life of obedience for everyone

who, as His disciple, places their faith and trust in Him. As St. Paul says,

Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me. (*Galatians 2:20*)

As Jesus shares in our humanity, we share, through faith, in His divinity, and are empowered by grace to love others, even our enemies with supernatural love, and bear our crosses as his cross.

In this way, the whole of Jesus's incarnation, but as culminated on the cross, is precisely how we come to be sharers in His divine life (2 *Peter* 1:4). Through the cross, through our sin and hate and selfishness and pride, God, in Jesus, loves us sinners into becoming His beloved children, brothers of the Eternal Son of God. The cross of Christ heals our estrangement from God, not by satisfying the blood requirement of a vengeful deity, but by fulfilling on our behalf the plan and purpose for which God created free creatures, capable but failing of human love. Not only does Jesus' sacrificial love overcome our failure to love, through faith and being incorporated into Him Himself, as members of his very body, we become sanctified and by His grace, love with a super-human, divine love – the very Love between the Father and the Son which is the God's own inner life, the life of the Holy Trinity.

Through the cross, through our sin and hate and selfishness and pride, God, in Jesus, loves us sinners into becoming His beloved children, brothers of the Eternal Son of God.

Salvation and Human Freedom

Since we participate in Jesus's redemption through faith in Him (which God's grace enables us to have) another difference between Catholics and some other Christians concerns whether our response to God's grace happens all at once and forever, or whether we need to continue to respond to grace with faith over a lifetime. Instead of being "saved" in one moment by just one profession of faith, Catholics understand that you have to persevere in a life of faith. A person may have a very powerful and emotional conversion at one very particular moment in time. But the salvation that comes through faith is not over and finished as soon as one accepts Jesus Christ and is baptized, because salvation,

as we have seen, is a sharing in God's nature, His very life of love. It is only in accepting Jesus, however this happens, that the life of faith has begun, a life lived in obedience to God. As Jesus Himself says, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (*Matthew 7:21*).

Both Catholics and most non-Catholic Christians hold that we must cooperate with God's grace in order to have faith in Christ and receive the salvation won by Him on the cross. Even though Jesus died for everyone (1 *Timothy 2:6*), not everyone is thereby saved. Only those who, by cooperating with God's grace, believe in Jesus Christ and accept His sacrifice, and just as importantly, live out that faith in a life of obedience to God's commands through good works and reception of the sacraments. Catholics believe that our cooperation has to last until the end of our life in order to reach final and ultimate salvation in heaven.

If faith and a life lived in grace are not sustained and nurtured, of if they are out-right rejected, the salvation that comes through grace can be lost.

This is why St. Paul tells Christians to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work" (*Philippians 2:12-13*). Elsewhere St. Paul says, "For through the Spirit, by faith, we await the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus, [what] counts for anything [is] only faith working through love" (*Galatians*

5:5-6). So, if faith and a life lived in grace are not sustained and nurtured, of if they are out-right rejected, the salvation that comes through grace can be lost.

Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: 'Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith' (1 *Timothy 1: 18-19*)" (*CCC162*).

Catholics believe, as Christians have from the beginning, that one can fall away from faith, and so lose the salvation they have been offered. Jesus warns about the "one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away." (*Matthew 13:20-21*) As St. Paul warns, "See, then, the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who fell,

but kindness to you, provided you remain in his kindness, otherwise you too will be cut off” (*Romans* 11:22-23; see also, *Matthew* 26:21-46, *Luke* 8:13, 1 *Timothy* 4:1-2, *Hebrews* 10:26-27). He did not even consider his own salvation completely assured and beyond any possibility of being lost (see 1 *Corinthians* 9:27 and 10:12).

As Catholics, we believe that if we are faithful in our service, God will be faithful to His promises to save those who, through faith, belong to His Son and live out salvation in a life of loving service, by which we share in the divine nature of the God who is Love. We have some assurance of salvation, but this assurance is not completely guaranteed since we always remain free to reject God’s offer of grace or cease living a life of love.

Good Works Done in Faith

So, while faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation, Catholics believe that it must also be lived out through good works, as Scripture attests. “So also, faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. . . See how a person is justified by

So also, faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. . . See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. . . For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:17, 24, 26)

works and not by faith alone. . . For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (*James* 2:17, 24, 26). Jesus himself says salvation and eternal life depend on good works: you will “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” because “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (*Matthew* 25:31-46)

When done in faith and for the love of God, these works really are good, and so pleasing to God. These works will therefore be rewarded by God. As St. Paul says, God “will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works” (*Romans* 2:6-7; see also *Galatians* 6:8-9).

It is not that God merely forgives our sins by having his innocent Son suffer the punishment we deserve, declaring us thus innocent (ignoring the fact that we are depraved and corrupted by sin). Instead, God united Himself to the human race by becoming a man in Jesus Christ, and His life of obedient service, ultimately His sacrifice on the cross, restores humanity to the Father on our

behalf. God gives us the grace, through faith, to unite ourselves with Christ and so share in the redemption he brought about through his cross, and by His power working in us, our sinfulness is healed and we are restored to God's favor. That is, we are sanctified, made holy, sharing more and more fully in the divine nature of God who is Love. We become more holy as we unite ourselves more and more closely to Jesus: Christ living in us. (*Galatians 2:20*)

It is, therefore, not easy for a Catholic to answer the question, "Are you saved?" There are really three tenses of answers to this question for Catholics: I **have been redeemed** from my sins through the blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross for me and for the whole world. I **am being saved** by cooperating in faith with the grace God offers me to do His will. I **will be saved** and happy forever in God's presence in heaven if I persevere in the life of grace, and die in that state.

CATHOLICS AND THE BIBLE

The Bible is the Inspired Word of God

As was mentioned earlier in this little work, you need to pray every day and take time to talk with God. As was also said earlier, one of the best ways to talk with God is by reading the Bible and praying the Scriptures. The Catholic Church has always encouraged all Christians to read and pray Scripture and even made this recommendation at the Second Vatican Council, one of the strongest and most solemn methods of teaching that the Church can use.

But this brings up an important question about the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Bible. It can seem that the Bible is not very important to Catholics since your average Catholic doesn't seem to know the Bible very well. Because of this, some people think that the Catholic Church does not view the Bible as necessary to know God's plan of salvation.

Since God, who is Truth Himself, is the primary author of Scripture, what He intended to communicate is true with certainty.

Without question, Catholics believe that Sacred Scripture, i.e. the Holy Bible, is the inspired word of God, and that through it, God accurately communicates the truth about Himself and His loving plan of salvation which He intends all humanity to come to know. Since God, who is Truth Himself, is the primary author of Scripture,

what He intended to communicate is true with certainty. For Catholics, the Bible is certainly necessary for knowing God and His plan of salvation.

Even though the Bible is the infallible Word of God, this does not mean that there is no human dimension to Scripture. God, in communicating His Word to humankind, made use of human beings who spoke in human language. God chose to use human authors and their own speech and manner of expression just as much as He chose the message to be conveyed in these human terms. This means that the message He wanted to communicate would be conditioned by the human elements He used. But the whole package of Scripture, divine and human elements together, is a faithful representation of God's Word, since even the human elements were chosen in order to convey what God intends.

As necessary and trustworthy as the Bible is, this does not mean that grasping the correct meaning of every passage is an easy or straight-forward thing. In order to understand Scripture, you need to know both how a particular part of Scripture fits into the overall plan of salvation of mankind, as well as what the human author meant by the words, forms of expression, and literary style he uses. But this does not take away from the Scripture being inspired and trustworthy, since even these words, forms of expressions and literary styles were also chosen by God to communicate His intended meaning.

God in communicating His Word to humankind, made use of human beings who spoke in human language. Even the human elements were chosen in order to convey what He intends.

This does mean, however, that one needs help in understanding God's Word. This help can come from scholars of the ancient languages, customs, and social institutions of the times and places in which the books of the Bible were written. But most especially this help comes from God Himself, in an equally dependable and common manner, namely through His Church.

***Sola Scriptura* - Is the Bible Alone the sole and complete source for the Christian faith?**

One of the main points of disagreement between Catholic and non-Catholic (Protestant) Christians is over whether the Bible alone (*Sola Scriptura*) is

complete and sufficient in itself to guide us in faith. Some Protestants believe that everything *necessary* for salvation and living the Christian life is taught clearly enough in the Bible for every believer to find and understand it there. Some Protestant Christians argue that while the church, other believers, and pastors, are aids to following Christ and living fully the Christian life, nothing and no one besides the Bible provides the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Bible alone is all one needs to understand how to follow Christ.

We Catholics, on the other hand, believe that Sacred Tradition, as preserved in the Teaching Authority (*Magisterium*) of the bishops in union with the pope, together with the authority of Sacred Scripture, determine what Christians do and should believe.

Sacred Tradition, the Teaching Authority (*Magisterium*) of the Church, and Sacred Scripture, together determine what Christians do and should believe.

Those who favor the idea of *Sola Scriptura* most often cite 2 *Timothy* 3: 16-17. “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (*Revised Standard Version*). This passage seems to say that Scripture is all one needs to belong to God, and some other translations clearly reflect this interpretation (“It gives the man who belongs to God everything he needs to work well for Him” (*New Life Version*)).

Unfortunately, this text does not really support the idea that Scripture alone makes every Christian complete in his or her faith. First, the context of the passage clearly indicates that what Paul means by “the man of God” is a minister of the Church, not the average Christian. He is addressing one who has the ministry of evangelist (chapter 4, v. 5). Second, the Scriptures Paul is referring to are the ones Timothy has known from infancy (v. 15), so they could not include what we call the New Testament, but only the Jewish Scriptures. Clearly, the Old Testament, by itself, is not sufficient for a Christian to come to salvation in Christ. Next, the Greek word that is translated as “complete” or “competent” is *artios* which simply means “suitable” or “fit.”

This passage clearly *does* say that the minister of God needs to know the Scriptures, and that such knowledge contributes to his competence. But it *does not say* that the Scriptures *alone* are completely sufficient for the minister’s

fitness for his ministry. Instead, Paul commands Timothy to also remain faithful to what Paul himself taught him (v. 14). The context clearly shows that St. Paul himself believes that Scripture is not a sufficient guide all by itself for the Christian life.

Moreover, other passages of Scripture seem to attribute completeness for the Christian life to things other than Scripture. For instance, *James* 1:4 says: “And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect (*teleioi*) and complete (*holoklepoi*), lacking in nothing.” Perseverance, here in *James* 1, seems to make the Christian just as complete and perfect as Scripture is said to do in *2 Timothy* 3, but *teleioi* and *holoklepoi* are much stronger Greek words than *artios*. Perseverance would then seem to be more important than knowledge of Scriptures.

There are other passages, too, that indicate that things other than Scripture make Christians perfect: good works (*Titus* 3:8), purity from idle and profane talk (*2 Timothy* 2:16-21), and prayer (*Colossians* 4:12). Most Christians will admit that perseverance, good works, purity, and prayer are all necessary components of the Christian life, but that none of them alone are sufficient for salvation. So, while Scripture is good and necessary to know and serve God, *2 Timothy* 3:16-17 does not say that Scripture *alone* is sufficient for salvation.

The theory of *Sola Scriptura* is not taught in Scripture, but is instead a tradition of man (originating in the 16th century with Martin Luther). Scripture does not claim to be a complete and sufficient source of those things necessary for salvation. Instead, it indicates that the very composition of Scripture itself derived from the Tradition given to the Apostles and handed on to their successors. Moreover, Scripture itself commands the adherence to this earlier Apostolic Tradition, that this Tradition has been preserved in a visible, historical Church. Finally, Scripture also declares that its interpretation is neither easy, nor is it up to an individual.

The very composition of Scripture derived from the Tradition given to the Apostles, and Scripture commands adherence to this Tradition.

Apostolic Tradition is the Source of Scripture

The central theme of the Gospels is that the life and teaching of Jesus is the rule of faith.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age (*Matthew* 28:19-20; emphasis added).

The Gospels themselves, however, tell us that they are not a complete account of all Jesus taught and commanded. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book” (*John* 20: 30).

It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, we know that his testimony is true. There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written (*John* 21:22-25).

Jesus embodied in His life and words the saving Gospel, the Good News that God had come to save us from our sins. This Gospel was first preached by Jesus, and then by His Apostles with His authority. “Whoever listens to you, listens to me” (*Luke* 10:16). A trustworthy and sure record of this Gospel was later written down, but as John tells us, a complete and total record of the Gospel of Jesus’ life could never be written down. Jesus’ life, though, is preserved in the community of disciples, the Church, He calls to Himself. “Remain in me, as I remain in you” (*John* 15:4). He gave the Church the word He received (*John* 17:14), and this is the word which the Church preaches so the world may believe (*John* 17:20).

So, when St. Paul tells the Christians what they should take as their rule of faith, he points to the preaching he left them, the Tradition of the Gospel he handed on to them.

Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours. (2 Thessalonians 2: 15)

He even calls both what he preached orally and what he wrote the “Traditions” that they are to hold on to.

Now I am reminding you brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. . . . Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 *Corinthians* 15: 1-4, 11)

Furthermore, just as Jesus gave to the Apostles the Good News He wanted them to preach, so they handed it on to their successors, the bishops and pastors they appointed, so that the transmission of this Tradition should continue.

You have learned, from many who can witness to it, the doctrine which I hand down; give it into the keeping of men you can trust, men who will know how to teach it to others besides themselves.(2 *Timothy* 2: 2)

Jesus Christ Himself authorized the Church He founded on His Apostles to preach and preserve the Good News of salvation. The Apostles handed on this Gospel in their preaching and care for Christ's flock as a Sacred Tradition, and this was the sole rule of faith and the Christian life before there was any Christian Scriptures. This is why St. Paul says that the Church, not any set of writings, is the "pillar and foundation of truth" (1 *Timothy* 3:15).

Sacred Scripture and Tradition in the Church

The Good News which Jesus and, by His authority, the Apostles preached before His death on the cross is the same word of God which the Apostles gave to the trustworthy men who succeeded them as bishops and pastors. This Gospel of Jesus Christ was first preserved and handed on as Sacred Tradition, and eventually came to be written, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the books and letters of the New Testament.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ was first preserved and handed on as Sacred Tradition and eventually came to be written, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the New Testament.

Just as there would be no Scripture without the Sacred Tradition which historically preceded it, so Sacred Tradition, functioning in the Church, defines, guarantees, and preserves the authentic Scriptures. As the Church declared at the Second Vatican Council,

Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit.

To the successors of the apostles, sacred Tradition hands on in its full purity God's word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit.

To the successors of the apostles, sacred Tradition hands on in its full purity God's word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Thus, by the light of the Spirit of truth, these successors can in their preaching preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known.

Consequently, it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same devotion and reverence. (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, paragraph 9)

Teaching Authority of the Church Determined Which Books Belong in the Bible

As necessary and inspired, trustworthy and enriching as the Bible is, the Bible, in and of itself, is not complete and sufficient to stand alone apart from the authority Jesus gave to His Church. The Bible is not a single book, but a collection of different works of literature. Included in it are a total of 73 texts: 46 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. (Catholics and Protestants even disagree about the number of inspired books that should be included in the "Bible." See below.)

There are, however, many works of literature, both Jewish and Christian, written at the same times and with similar themes, which have not been included. For instance, the *Third Book of Esdras* was written around 300 BC at about the same time as the Biblical *Book of Ezra*, and the *Didache* (*The Teaching of the Twelve*) and the *Letter of Barnabas* were written around 70 AD, the same time as the Gospel of Mark (though this was probably written much earlier). And there are other, much later Christian text such as the *Gospel of Peter* or the *Gospel of the Hebrews* along with many, many even later texts (the so-called Gnostic (or “Hidden” or “Forbidden”) Gospels). Each of these texts have been considered inspired by different communities of Christians at different times.

So, how have Christians been able to tell which texts are inspired? Clearly, it just doesn’t happen that each Christian puts together a Bible for himself or herself, and that each of these Bibles just happen to contain all the same books. Do the publishers of Bibles look to some text of Scripture to tell them what belongs in the Bible? No, they and all Christians, Protestant and Catholic, are following some tradition which their church has given them about what the Bible is and which books it should contain. The real question is, which tradition is authoritative?

The Bible alone and by itself does not indicate which books should be included in it; there is no inspired Table of Contents for the Bible. (This is further evidence that the Bible alone does not contain everything necessary for salvation. Knowing which books are inspired is certainly necessary to understand and accept God’s plan of salvation, but this knowledge about identifying of recognizing inspired texts is not in the Bible.) Instead, the books in the Bible are the ones which the Catholic Church, acting through various councils and popes over several centuries, has determined to be inspired.

The Bible alone and by itself, does not indicate which books should be included in it; there is no inspired Table of Contents for the Bible.

Why do Catholic Bibles have more books than Protestant ones?

In the early Church, the question of which books were inspired, and which were not, didn’t seem as urgent as it has become since then. It was not until the Council of Rome (under Pope Damasus I) in 382 AD, and the Councils of Hippo

(393) and III Carthage (397) that the exact number and names of the books which would be considered inspired was agreed upon. Since then, all Christians, Protestant and Catholic, accept the set of 27 New Testament books which these councils recognized as inspired.

But when the pope and these councils of bishops determined the make-up of the Old Testament, they also recognized as inspired the Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures called the Septuagint. (Its name derives from the Greek word for 70 since it was said to have been translated by 70 scholars in 70 days.) This Greek Old Testament was the most common in the Mediterranean world and was the one which all Christians had been using up until that time.

This version of the Old Testament is composed of Greek versions of the 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures (*Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah*, etc.) but also includes seven other books for which there were no Hebrew copies at the time: 1 & 2 *Maccabees*, *Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)*, *Wisdom*, *Baruch*, *Tobit*, and *Judith*, and parts of two others, *Daniel* and *Esther*. (Hebrew versions of some of these texts (*Sirach* and *Tobit*) were discovered between 1947 to 1956 among the Dead Sea Scrolls; this discovery undercuts the rationale which had been given for not considering them inspired.)

The fact that there were not Hebrew versions of these books at the time made some, especially the Jewish authorities in the first century AD, question their authenticity. In reaction to the growth of the Christian believers as a separate group within Judaism, the Jewish authorities adopted the 39 books of the Old Testament written in Hebrew as their official Scriptures (partly because the Greek works referred to a future resurrection of the dead (e.g. 2 *Maccabees* 12: 43).) But for Christians, from the first centuries until the 16th century, the only version of the Bible that was considered inspired contained all 73 books, including all those found only in the Septuagint

Martin Luther decided in the 1500's to exclude seven books from the Old Testament; he also excluded the New Testament books of Hebrews, James and Revelations, but later Protestants put these three back in.

Martin Luther, however, decided in the 1500's to exclude the seven Greek books from the Bible and accept only the Hebrew Old Testament. He also excluded the New Testament books of *Hebrews*, *James* and *Revelations*, but later Protestants put these three back in. To correct this new tradition of Luther's, the Catholic Church at the Council of

Trent (1545-1564) finally and authoritatively defined the Bible as containing all 73 books identified by the Councils of Rome, Carthage III and Hippo in the 4th century.

Tradition Interprets the Meaning of Scripture

Scripture itself tells us that it is neither easy nor a personal matter to decide what God intends to communicate in the words of Scripture.

In them (the letters of St. Paul) there are some things hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures. Therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, be on your guard not to be led into the error of the unprincipled and to fall from your own stability. (2 *Peter* 3:16-17)

Saint Peter earlier warned Christians the meaning of Scripture is not something that a person can just decide on his or her own.

Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation. (2 *Peter* 1: 20)

There is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation.

Instead, Jesus promises to send the Spirit to remain in the Church to help us understand and apply the truth of the Gospel He left us.

I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. (*John* 16: 12-13)

The successors of the Apostles, the bishops in union with Peter's successor, the pope, primarily have the ministry of determining the authentic and authoritative meaning for Scripture in accordance with Sacred Tradition. The authority is also exercised through different offices of the Church, and in our own time has been clearly presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

It is not surprising, therefore, that those Christians who claim their own authority to interpret scripture privately have varying interpretations of key

passages. One where the Catholic Church believes Jesus was speaking plainly and literally (though of a Sacramental reality) is when He calls Himself the Bread of Life.

[Jesus said,] “. . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. . .” (*John* 6: 51-56)

Another is where Jesus gives the apostles the authority and power to forgive sins. “He breathed on them said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained’” (*John* 20:22-23).

In these two passages, Jesus is telling His disciples that He gives Himself to them in the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist and forgives sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), and that His Apostles have the authority to hand on these Sacraments in the Church He founded. Not surprisingly, Christians who believe Jesus did not institute these Sacraments or found this kind of Church have a different interpretation of these Scriptures. But the very fact that there are different interpretations (and hundreds of different Christian denominations) at least shows that Scripture is not so clear that every ordinary believer is able to completely understand core teachings of Jesus unaided.

If every Christian were able to get by himself alone everything God meant for us to understand in Scripture, there would not be the many, many differing interpretations among genuine and sincere Christians.

If every Christian were able to get by himself alone everything God meant for us to understand in Scripture, there would not be the many, many differing interpretations among genuine and sincere Christians, nor would Peter have been right to warn the readers of his letter against the danger of personal

(mis)interpretation. Happily, Jesus has not left us unaided. He has given us the aid of the Holy Spirit present in the Catholic Church to understand Scripture correctly, just as this Holy Spirit was present to inspire the writing of Scripture, and to recognize which texts were inspired.

SACRAMENTS

The use of Sacraments, more than any other feature, visibly distinguishes Catholics (like the Orthodox and Anglican traditions) from among other Christians. These seven sacraments, i.e., Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation (Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony (marriage) and Holy Orders (priesthood), are signs or symbolic actions which Jesus gave us to communicate the spiritual realities and grace necessary to be His followers.

The Sacraments bring us into His family, making us sons and daughters with and in Him, sharers in His divine nature (2 *Peter* 1:4). They strengthen our bond with Him and bring us forgiveness for our sins through His sacrifice on the cross. All the Sacraments have this in common: in them God uses visible signs (words, actions, bread, wine, oil, etc.) of spiritual realities (forgiveness, the Body and Blood of Christ, etc.) to confer grace. The Sacraments are signs, but not *just* signs. They are signs, instituted by Christ, that are or make real what they signify.

In the Sacraments of the Catholic Church “Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.” (CCC 1127).

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions. (CCC 1131).

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| <p>In all the Sacraments God uses visible signs of spiritual realities to confer grace.</p> |
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Baptism

The first sacrament which a Christian receives is baptism. In this symbolic washing, God makes us His adopted children. Whether by pouring water or being completely immersed in water, God heals the state of separation from Himself, the state of original sin, into which we are all born. By baptizing people to make them Christian, the Church is carrying out the command of Jesus:

Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (*Matthew 28:18-20*)

**Whoever believes
and is baptized will
be saved.**

Jesus even said that this Sacrament is *necessary* for salvation. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” (*Mark 16:16*) “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” (*John 3:5*)

Likewise, the first disciples saw that baptism was essential as they preached the gospel and continued to establish the Church.

“Therefore, let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?” Peter (said) to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call.” He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day (*Acts 2:36-41*).

And St. Paul, when he was converted, was told “Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling upon his name.” (*Acts 22:16*)

St. Paul tells us that through baptism we receive salvation by being made heirs to eternal life with Christ.

But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. (*Titus 3:4-7*)

**God saved us
through the bath of
rebirth and renewal
by the Holy Spirit.**

Becoming heirs with Christ, adopted sons and daughters, is what ultimately saves us from sin and death, and allows us to inherit heaven along with Him.

Original Sin

To understand why baptism is necessary, we have to understand the state of separation from God that each of us is born into. “Just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned . . .” (*Romans 5:12*). After the sin of Adam, all people would be born into the world separated from God and the friendship with Him which He originally intended. Even if a person has not committed a sin of their own, they do not come into the world with the grace that allows their complete union with God. And being estranged from God, all of us have since committed our own personal sins against God. Because of Original Sin, we constantly struggle between a desire to do good and the failure to do so. This failure to do good is sin. “For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want” (*Galatians 5:17*)

Being separated from God, the human race was in need of a Savior. In our need, and not because we deserved it, but only because He is loving and merciful, God graciously provided a man without sin, God made man, who could make up for all the sins of the rest of us. Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God, is this Savior.

For if, by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ (*Romans 5:17*).

It is through the Sacrament of Baptism that we enter into Christ's life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection.

Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. . . . If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him (*Romans 6:3-5, 8*).

By dying with Christ in the waters of baptism and rising with Him in a rebirth to new life, God makes us His adopted children, heirs to the life which Christ shares with the Father.

If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you. . . . For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (*Romans 8:11, 14-17*).

Through the ministry of the Church, God continues to bring people to salvation in faith by the waters of baptism.

As Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize and make disciples of all nations, it is the ordinary way of receiving God's grace and mercy. Of course, God can work outside of this normal means. Jesus Himself offers salvation to the good thief in response to his faith. "'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied to him, 'Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise'" (*Luke 23:42-43*).

The regular and ordinary way of becoming Jesus' disciple is through the Sacrament of Baptism with water administered by His Church.

But that it the exception to the rule which Jesus established. The Church recognizes these extraordinary cases as "Baptisms of Desire." The regular and ordinary way of becoming Jesus' disciple is through the Sacrament of Baptism with water administered by His Church.

Infant Baptism

Discipleship, and so baptism, must be accompanied by faith. But faith is a gift that is not merited, and so baptism is offered to infants who cannot profess their own faith. Jesus Himself showed that He wished for children to be brought to Him.

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (*Matthew 19:13-14*)

In the baptism of infants, the faith of parents, which they commit to handing on to their children, stands in the place of the children's own faith. These children will develop their own faith under their parents' guidance. Jesus often used other people's faith when offering His grace and forgiveness in His earthly ministry.

And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set (him) in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, "As for you, your sins are forgiven." (*Luke 5:18-20*).

In the Baptism of infants, the faith of parents stands in the place of the children's own faith. 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "As for you, your sins are forgiven.'"

Furthermore, baptism replaces the Jewish rite of circumcision for bringing new members into God's chosen people, the Church.

In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by hand, by stripping off the carnal body, with the circumcision of Christ. You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (*Colossians* 2:11-12)

Just as infants were normally circumcised and made members of the Jewish people because they would be raised in their family's Jewish faith, so infants have always been baptized and made members of Christ's Church because they would be raised in their family's Christian faith.

The Catholic practice of baptizing infants is sometimes a controversial issue with some Protestant Christians because it is not explicitly described in the Bible. There are indications, though, of the practice, as when whole households, which almost certainly included infants, were baptized (*Acts* 16:15, 33; 1 *Corinthians* 1:16). But all Christians should agree that there is nothing explicitly in Scripture which forbids infant baptism. Rather, this has been constant teaching and practice of the Church from the earliest centuries as explicitly described by St. Irenaeus (AD 189), Hippolytus (AD 215) and Origen (AD 244). Infant baptism is still practiced by Orthodox, Anglican (Episcopal), Lutheran and Methodist Christians.

Eucharist

The Sacrament which is most central to the life of the Catholic Church is the Eucharist celebrated at every Mass. It is a re-presentation of the Last Supper that Jesus ate with His disciples the night when He was betrayed into the hands of His enemies, the night before He was tortured and killed by being crucified.

Jesus showed that He is the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed and whose blood free us from slavery to sin.

The Last Supper was itself a celebration of the Jewish Passover. Every year, the Jewish people commemorate their Exodus from Egypt, when God, through Moses, led the Israelites out of slavery (*Exodus* 11-13). In the Passover, a lamb is sacrificed, and its blood is shed and put on

the door posts so that the angel of death (God's wrath) will *pass over* and spare the life of the first-born son of those who accept this sacrifice and eat this commemorative meal.

Jesus, when He celebrated this Passover with His disciples, fulfilled the prophecy contained in the Passover: He showed that He is the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed and whose blood would spare the life of those who believe in Him and free them from slavery to sin.

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many" (*Mark 14:22-24*; see also, *Matthew 26:26-28* & *Luke 22:19-20*).

Jesus thus offered Himself to His Apostles sacramentally the night before He died and, the next day, offered Himself on the cross as the final and definitive sacrifice for sin. As He said from the cross, "It is finished" (*John 19:30*) – meaning His life of restoring humanity to friendship with and adoption by God in obedience to the Father had come to an end – that one finished work of Jesus reverberates through time and space and is made present on every altar where a priest obeys His command, "Do this in memory of me." (*Luke 22:19*)

When Catholics celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we commemorate and re-present what Jesus did in His Last Supper and in His sacrifice on the cross. The Eucharist, as a re-presentation of the Last Supper, is the centerpiece of Catholic worship, the Mass. At Mass, the priest acts in the person of Christ; that is, Jesus Christ acts through the words and actions of the priest.

At Mass, the priest acts in the person of Christ. Jesus Christ acts through the words and actions of the priest.

So, when the priest, during the Eucharist, says the words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper, Jesus Christ is speaking. Jesus showed Himself to be the Lamb of sacrifice (of the Passover) by saying that the bread He gave them was His Body. Likewise, when the priest, holding bread, says "This is my body," Jesus makes Himself really and truly present there in the priest's hands, even though He appears as mere bread. The same happens with the wine: when the priest says, "This is my blood," Jesus is really and truly present, though appearing as wine.

What looks like bread and wine is no longer bread and wine, but the real, actual presence of the living Lord, Jesus Christ. In the Eucharist, Catholics are living out the promise Jesus made when He said,

I am the bread of life. . . . Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life. My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. (*John* 6:48, 54-56)

Jesus really means what He says here; He really does give His body and blood as food and drink, under the appearance of bread and wine.

All of Jesus is present in each and every part of the consecrated bread and wine.

In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*" (CCC 1374).

Just as He is present in all parts of the Eucharist, so He is present in His complete reality as both God and man, living and glorified.

Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist is clearly identified in Scripture as a Tradition first handed on to the Apostles from Christ Himself.

The belief in Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist and the fact that the Mass represents the Last Supper and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is one of the most important Traditions that has been handed on from the Apostles to their successors. This is a clear case where Sacred Tradition gives the proper understanding of Sacred Scripture. And it is clearly identified in Scripture as something that was first handed on to the Apostles from Christ Himself.

St. Paul never met Jesus before His crucifixion. Paul met Christ after He had risen from the dead, and He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul was called to be an Apostle by Jesus in the months following this encounter, and Jesus instructed him about the Gospel he was to preach. As St. Paul tells the church at Corinth:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 *Corinthians* 11:23-29)

In saying that those who receive the Eucharist unworthily sin against the Body of the Lord, St. Paul is telling them that Jesus’ Body is truly present in the Eucharist. Paul is saying that the one who eats of the Eucharist should discern Jesus’ body, be able to see and understand that He is there. Furthermore, Paul is clear in saying that he received this teaching directly from Jesus Himself, after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

If any part of Scripture is to be understood literally and plainly, it is Jesus’ institution of the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Himself as true food. The food of Christ’s own self sustains our spiritual life and sanctifies us so that we live with Jesus’ own life.

**The food of Christ’s
own self sustains
our spiritual life
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Jesus’ own life.**

How is Mass Jesus’s Sacrifice?

Most active Catholics have a pretty strong belief that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, and that what looks like bread and wine is no longer bread and wine, but the real, actual presence of the living Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Eucharist, Jesus fulfills the promise He made when He said in the *Gospel of John*, Chapter 6,

I am the bread of life. ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life. My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.
John 6:48, 54-56

We Catholics believe that Jesus really means what He says here; He really does give His body and blood as food and drink, under the appearance of bread and wine.

A recent study, though, indicates that around 1/3 of people who identify as Catholic do not believe this. We have to do better in sharing this truth of our faith even with our fellow Catholics.

But what even some active Catholics may miss is that the Mass itself makes present not just the living Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus, but His very sacrifice by which He saves us. This is why attending Mass is so important, and why it is more than our opportunity to receive Jesus in Holy Communion (though it is that, too).

We need to understand that the Mass is a memorial of the Last Supper and the Last Supper was itself a memorial celebration of the Jewish Passover. But a memorial in this sacred, Jewish sense is not just a calling to mind of what happened in the past – like looking at a photo album, or retelling family stories – but a renewing and reliving of the Covenants God made and makes with the people He chose and chooses for His own.

In commemorating their Exodus from Egypt, Jewish people every year, not only remember, but relive the central events which define them as God's own Holy People, when He, through Moses, led the Israelites out of slavery (*Exodus* 11-13). In this celebration of Passover, a lamb is sacrificed, and its blood is shed and put on the door posts so that the angel of death (God's wrath) will pass over and spare the life of the first-born son of those who accept this sacrifice and eat this commemorative meal (*CCC* 1363). In this, they not only remember and relive these events, but also renew their commitment to God, and their covenant with Him, which He made with them through these events.

Jesus fulfills and completes the promises made in the original Passover by revealing that He is the true Lamb of God.

Jesus, when He celebrated this Passover with His disciples at the Last Supper, engages in this same memorial action (remembering, reliving, and renewing the covenant), but He also fulfills and completes the promises made in the original Passover by revealing that He is the true Lamb of God who would be sacrificed and whose blood would spare the life of those who

believe in Him and free them from slavery to sin. And He made this Covenant present to His disciples the night before He actually fulfills the sacrifice and establishes this New Covenant on the cross the next day, on Good Friday.

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said,

“Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.” *Mark* 14:22-24; see also, *Matthew* 26:26-28 and *Luke* 22:19-20 and 1 *Corinthians* 11:23-29.

There is only one New Covenant which Jesus made in shedding His blood for the salvation of mankind. It was fully realized on Good Friday on the cross. But He made that very same sacrifice present the night before that event. And so, when we Catholics celebrate the Eucharist at each Mass, we commemorate and re-present – make present again – what Jesus did in His Last Supper and in His sacrifice on the cross.

Each Mass commemorates and re-presents – makes present again – what Jesus did in His Last Supper and in His sacrifice on the cross.

The Mass is not a new sacrifice of Jesus; Jesus made only one saving sacrifice. As the *Letter to the Hebrews* says, Jesus

because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. *Hebrews* 7:24-27

As the *Catechism* says:

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present. “As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which ‘Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed’ is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.” (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 3; cf. 1 *Corinthians* 5:7). (CCC 1364)

Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood." (CCC, 1365)

The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit. (CCC 1366)

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice. (CCC 1367)

The Mass is also our sacrifice which we make with and in Jesus's offering of Himself to the Father.

The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church . . . which is the Body of Christ [who] participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. . . . [our] praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. (CCC 1368)

And the rest of the Church is present, too – especially the Church Triumphant in heaven.

To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here on earth, but also those already in the glory of heaven.... In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ. (CCC 1370)

So don't miss Mass so you won't miss out on all that is made present there.

Confirmation

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, Catholics receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to complete our incorporation into Christ's body, the Church. We become true members of Christ's body at our baptism, but Confirmation completes and confirms God's grace of adoption, and our commitment to God.

By the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.” (CCC 1285)

Confirmation strengthens the life of grace and seals our commitment with the Holy Spirit. “But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; he has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.” (2 *Corinthians* 1: 21-22)

This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial. (CCC 1296)

As the gift of the Holy Spirit seals and completes our membership in the Church, confirmation enables and demands our sharing Christ with others. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles after Jesus ascended into heaven which got them to begin preaching the gospel to the world.

As the gift of the Holy Spirit seals and completes our membership in the Church, confirmation enables and demands our sharing Christ with others.

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. (*Acts* 2:1-4)

The symbolic action by which the Holy Spirit normally is given in Confirmation is a bishop laying his hands on the person he is confirming. This normally happens sometime after a person is baptized as an infant in the Roman Catholic Church. This practice reflects that these two Sacraments were given separately in the early Church.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and

prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit (*Acts* 8:14-17).

When adults become Roman Catholic, though, normally they receive this sacrament from a priest at Easter at the same time they are baptized, as do infants when they are baptized in the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches.

Confession or the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession is another symbolic action in which we encounter Christ and receive the reality of His grace. When we are sorry for having offended God, and seek to be reconciled to Him, we confess our sins to a priest who, as the representative of God (i.e. of Jesus, the Son of God), is able to give us God's forgiveness and reconciliation.

We have faith that Jesus acts through the priest, so when the priest says "I absolve you," Jesus Christ thereby absolves, that is, forgives the sins.

Although it looks to one without faith as though we are confessing our sins only to another man, nevertheless we have faith that Jesus acts through the priest. And so, when the priest says "I absolve you," Jesus Christ thereby absolves, that is, forgives your sins.

Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name. (*CCC* 1441)

Jesus gave the power to forgive sins to His Apostles. "(Jesus) said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained'" (*John* 20:21-23). The power and authority to forgive sins has been handed on to the successors of the Apostles for the last 2000 years.

And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was

reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 *Corinthians* 5:18-19)

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful. (*James* 5:16)

An important part of the sacrament is the penance which the priest assigns; it is some sacrificial act or some prayers which help the sinner overcome the harmful effects, either to others or to himself, which the sin has caused.

Penance is some sacrificial act or some prayers which help the sinner overcome the harmful effects of sin.

Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must “make satisfaction for” or “expiate” his sins. This satisfaction is also called “penance.” (CCC 1459)

The harm done to one’s friendship with God is taken away when Christ, through the ministry of the priest, forgives the sins; the harm done to oneself or to society is repaired through the penance assigned by the priest. (For more on the need for penance to atone for the temporal harm of sin, see the section on **Purgatory**, below.)

Why Confession?

But why do we confess? That is, why do we, in addition to being sorry for our sins, have to say them out loud? And to another person, a priest? Couldn’t we just tell God we are sorry, and he forgive us? Or couldn’t priests just forgive the sins of everyone before Mass?

Well, God could have set things up like this, I suppose. But it seems that He thinks it’s important to actually ask for forgiveness – to say our sins out loud

and to say we are sorry. What the Bible says is that Jesus wants priests to either forgive sins or retain them. Some sins, apparently, should not be forgiven, and some should. And so that the priest can know which ones to give absolution for, he has to hear them from the person seeking forgiveness, and so the that person has to confess them out loud.

Which sins should not be forgiven? you may ask. Shouldn't a priest forgive every sin?

Well, no. Most basically, a priest should not forgive the sins a person is not truly sorry for, or which they do not intend to refrain from committing in the future. So, if in your confession you make it clear that you're really not sorry or that you intend to continue committing adultery or stealing or whatever, a priest cannot forgive those sins; he should retain them.

But also, certain especially serious and public sins, like public renunciation of the faith, physically assaulting the pope, or breaking the seal of confession, only the pope can forgive.

When Jesus died for the sins of all mankind, it is not that God automatically, preemptively forgives each personal future sin so that no one needs to repent of them. If that were the case, all people everywhere would already be reconciled to God – no personal faith or repentance would ever be necessary to receive God's gift of himself in Heaven. On the cross, Jesus gave access to the Father's forgiveness – and that access is not made possible without Jesus' sacrifice – but the forgiveness has to be applied to us whenever we, through our sins, have need of it.

Christians sometimes still commit serious sin, and we need to repeatedly ask for forgiveness in order to persevere to final salvation.

The Bible makes clear that faith and repentance are necessary throughout our life, that Christians sometimes still commit serious sin, and we need to repeatedly ask for forgiveness in order to persevere to final salvation. This is what Jesus taught in the prayer we call the "Our Father" or "The Lord's Prayer," "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." (*Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:4*)

Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation, whereby priests continue to apply the forgiveness won through His death on the cross to the actual sins of his future followers, Christians down through the ages.

So, confession and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a great source of God's grace and the loving care He shows to us while we are still sinners, to bring us back into friendship with Him and to strengthen us to persevere in that friendship.

Anointing of the Sick

Another sacrament of God's mercy and healing is the Anointing of the Sick. In this sacrament, a priest anoints a Catholic who is seriously ill with oil which has been blessed for this purpose, and prays on behalf of the community for this person's healing. Through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the Church continues to offer Jesus' healing touch to those who are physically afflicted.

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. So, they went off and preached repentance. They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. (*Mark 6:7,12-13*)

The main effects of the sacrament are spiritual: the strength and peace to endure suffering, as well as healing for the soul, i.e., forgiveness for sins. It can also be a means of physical healing according to God's will. As with the Eucharist, this sacrament is clearly referred to Scripture:

Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint (him) with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven (*James 5:14-15*).

Marriage

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, God sanctifies and elevates the natural love of a man and a woman in marriage. Jesus tells His disciples that this institution was originally intended by

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| Marriage, as a sacrament of the Church, symbolizes and confers God's grace through a life of mutual love and sacrifice. |
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God to be a grace and blessing to mankind, and that God meant it to be permanent.

“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother (and be joined to his wife), and the two shall become one flesh.’ So, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” In the house the disciples again questioned him about this. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (*Mark* 10:6-12; see also *Matthew* 19:5-6)

The teaching that marriage requires a permanent commitment is repeated by St. Paul.

Thus, a married woman is bound by law to her living husband; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law in respect to her husband. Consequently, while her husband is alive she will be called an adulteress if she consorts with another man. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and she is not an adulteress if she consorts with another man (*Romans* 7:2-3; see also *1 Corinthians* 7:10-11)

Marriage, as a sacrament of the Church, symbolizes and confers God’s grace through a life of mutual love and sacrifice. In marriage, the husband and wife communicate God’s love through all aspects of their love for each other, and this love naturally produces and cares for their children. God extends His love through married Christians to build up the Church and sanctify the world. Ultimately, the reason why marriage is a sacrament is that it symbolizes Christ’s love for Church.

Just as Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom gave Himself totally for His Bride, the Church, so a husband and his wife give themselves totally to each other.

Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives

should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over

for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason, a man shall leave (his) father and (his) mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband. (*Ephesians* 5:22-33; see also *Colossians* 3:18-19)

Just as Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom gave Himself totally for His Bride, the Church, so a husband and his wife give themselves totally to each other.

Just as Christ's commitment to the Church is permanent, so marriage endures until death. In heaven, the blessed will be enjoying the wedding-feast of the Lamb (*Revelation* 19:7, 9), and so there will no longer be the need to symbolize this in marriage (see *Matthew* 22:23-30 and *Mark* 12:18-25). Thus, a marriage lasts until death.

A natural and holy part of the Sacrament of Matrimony is the sexual relationship between husband and wife.

Since God created [them] man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: "And God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'" (CCC 1604)

Since sex has a naturally tendency to produce children and to bring the couple closer together in love, the Church insists that all uses of sex must preserve these aspects if they are to be morally good. Any kind of sexual acts outside of marriage

Since sex has a natural tendency to produce children and to bring the couple closer together in love, the Church insists that all use of sex must preserve these aspects.

(pre-marital, adulterous, masturbation, and homosexual) and which intentionally and artificially frustrates the reproductive purpose of sex within marriage (artificial birth control or deliberate sterilization) are morally wrong and serious sins.

“The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose.” For here sexual pleasure is sought outside of “the sexual relationship which is demanded by the moral order and in which the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love is achieved.” (CCC 2352)

Birth Control

The Church expects married couples to be responsible in the number of children they have. “For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood” (CCC 2368).

The Church permits birth control so long as the method used does not frustrate the natural reproductive tendency.

The Church therefore permits birth control, so long as the method used does not artificially frustrate the reproductive tendency through chemical contraceptives, barriers, or sterilization. “[T]he methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods is in

conformity with the objective criteria of morality.” (CCC 2370) These acceptable methods of birth control are often labeled Natural Family Planning (NFP).

Holy Orders

Jesus Christ continues His care and offers His grace for His Church through the ministry of priests. In most of the Sacraments, the priest acts in the person of Christ through His words and actions, to make present the graces Christ is offering through them. At the last Supper, Christ instituted this sacrament of Holy Orders, which makes men into instruments of Christ’s ministry. “Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is

my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me’.” (*Luke 22:19*) In order that the Church may ‘do this,’ i.e., celebrate the Eucharist, He ordained the Apostles to act in His name.

Likewise, He made them the instruments of the forgiveness for sins He offers through the Sacrament of Confession. “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.’” (*John 20:21-22*).

As it has been handed on by the Apostles, a man receives ordination by a successor of the Apostles, i.e., a bishop, laying hands on him.

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off. (*Acts 13:3*; see also *Acts 6:6*)

Priests are appointed to their ministry by the Church, and receive the power and authority to perform their ministry from God who acts through the bishop. “They appointed presbyters for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith” (*Acts 14:23*).

Priests and bishops have this authority in order to share in the care Christ shows for His Church. “Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the church of God that he acquired with his own blood” (*Acts 20:28*).

The ordination which a man receives to be a priest is itself a Sacrament, as symbolic action by which God gives His grace. This Sacrament makes a real difference for the priest and for the Church. “For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.” (2 *Timothy 1:6-7*; see also 1 *Timothy 4:14*)

The sacrament configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he

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| <p>By ordination a priest is enabled to act as an instrument and representative of Christ, Head of the Church.</p> |
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may serve as Christ's instrument for the Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet and king (CCC 1581).

Celibacy of Priests

In the Roman Catholic Church, normally only unmarried men may be ordained. (In the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches this is not the rule, and there

In requiring celibacy of priests, the Catholic Church takes seriously the high value Jesus places on this sacrifice and gift.

are a few exceptions made for Protestant ministers who have converted to the Catholic Church.) In requiring celibacy of its priests, the Catholic Church takes seriously the high value Jesus places on this sacrifice and gift:

[His] disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept [this] word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it." (*Matthew* 19:10-12)

St. Paul, too, tells us that some are called to give up the chance to marry in order to serve the Lord.

Indeed, I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. Now to the unmarried and to widows, I say: it is a good thing for them to remain as they are, as I do, but if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be on fire. (1 *Corinthians* 7:7-9)

An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided. An unmarried woman or a virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit. A married woman, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a

restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction. (1 *Corinthians* 7:32-35)

The Church requires celibacy not because sex and marriage are considered dirty or unworthy of God. As we saw with the Sacrament of Matrimony, just the opposite is true. Sex and marriage are so holy that they are a means of God's grace and love, and so have to be treated with great care and respect. But a priest sacrifices the good of a wife in order to imitate Christ by making himself available to all of God's people.

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And Jesus promises to reward those who make this sacrifice. "And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life." (*Matthew* 19:29)

Addressing Priests as 'Father.'

Some Christians claim that Catholics are disobeying a direct command of Jesus by calling priests 'Father.' "Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven" (*Matthew* 23:9). From the context of this verse, though, it is clear that Jesus is warning His disciples against the pride and hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He tells His disciples to obey the Pharisees' authority, but not to imitate their example. Clearly, when Catholics call a priest 'Father' we are not doing so to satisfy the priest's pride or to put him in the place of God. The term has come to be used to refer to the fatherly care which priests are to show toward their flock.

Priests are spiritual fathers to Catholics, since we receive the life of grace through them. If Jesus' words were to be taken as so hollowly literal, St. Paul would not call himself a spiritual father to his flocks. But he does precisely this in several places in Scripture. "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." (1 *Corinthians* 4:15) "As you know, we treated each one of you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (1 *Thessalonians* 2:11-12; see also *Philemon* 10)

In the passage above from *Matthew* 23, Jesus also apparently forbids his disciples calling any of their fellow believers “teacher,” yet Saint Paul lists teachers among the ministries that make up the Church, the Body of Christ: “And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. (*Ephesians* 4:11-12) Again, Jesus is warning against looking to anyone but Himself for true knowledge of the Father, but Christian teachers hand on that Truth they have received from the True Master and Teacher, so the Church has always used it to address or refer to these ministers. So it is with the title, Father. Jesus is not forbidding its legitimate use.

There is certainly nothing objectionable about Catholics addressing priests as ‘Father.’ Indeed, it is a rather trifling objection to raise against the Church since how we address our priests is nothing like a core belief.

PURGATORY

One controversial teaching of the Church is the doctrine of purgatory. Purgatory is the state in which a soul, which has been redeemed by Christ and assured of a place in heaven, is purified of the harm done to itself by its sin. Purgatory is the state in which, after having been judged, as Jesus put it, “you will never get out till you have paid the last penny” (*Matthew* 5:25-26).

Purgatory is the state where the damage to one's character from one's sin are cleansed away (i.e., purged as by fire).

Choices Have Consequence

To understand what purgatory is and why we (or most of us) need it, we can start with recognizing a pretty common part of the human experience: choices have consequences, not only to others and our relationships with them, but even to ourselves. Sometimes, when we make a bad choice, its effects stay with us. This is obvious in the choices that affect us in our bodies: what we eat and drink, and what we do to ourselves that leave a permanent mark on our person. What is true of actions done in and through our bodies, is true of all our bad choices, our sins, and even more than affecting our bodies, they affect our souls – creating dispositions or tendencies to act in similarly disordered and destructive ways. These dispositions or tendencies to act in disordered, that is, sinful ways

are vices, or bad habits, and habits, good or bad (virtues and vices) collectively constitute a person's character.

Our sins, beyond being offences against God, leave their effects on us, causing damage to our souls, and impeding our ability to live and function, especially to love, as God intended. This damage, so long as it remains, keeps us from attaining complete and perfect communion with God, for it keeps us from sharing fully in God's own life, which is a life of self-giving love. As we said above, this is what salvation and heaven ultimately consist in. This kind of effect of sin stays with us; it clings to us, and we have to rid ourselves of it in order to cling fully and completely to God.

Our sins, beyond being offences against God, leave their effects on us, causing damage to our souls, and impeding our ability to live, function, and love, as God intended.

As the Letter to the Hebrews says,

let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. (*Hebrews 12:2*)

And these effects of sin continue to cling to us, even though God forgives our offenses through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Yet, these effects are temporary so long as we are fundamentally in friendship with God, having accepted (and not subsequently rejected) His forgiveness, so that we remain in a state of His grace. Thus, sin has two effects:

First, and foremost, sin damages our relationship with God. Sin is fundamentally a rejection of the friendship God offers us, the offer to share in His life. In order to make us co-heirs with the Only-Begotten Son (and True Heir) of God, God gratuitously offers to adopt us as His children into the Divine community. Indeed, this is why He created us, to share in His Trinitarian life of love. To reject His offer of Himself in Love is the essence of sin, and this rejection results in our guilt before Him, our estrangement from Him. The Only Begotten Son of God therefore became a man in Jesus Christ, and died on the cross, just to atone for this guilt and overcome our estrangement (see **Why Jesus Died on the Cross**, above).

Mortal sin is the total rejection of God's love; it is deadly, killing the life of God in the soul. Venial sin is only a partial rejection; it is not deadly, but still damaging to the soul.

Now, we can damage our relationship with God, and thereby incur the guilt of sin, either

- **totally**, in a deadly manner, killing the life of God in the soul. This is called mortal sin (see 1 *John* 5:16 below), or
- **partially**. This is called venial sin.

The effect of mortal sin, if unrepented, is in the loss of eternal life. It is the rejection of heaven (i.e., hell) and it is called eternal punishment because this effect, if unredeemed, lasts forever. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, unrepented mortal sin makes us incapable of eternal life (CCC 1472).

So, hell is not the torture God (arbitrarily) inflicts on sinners for failing to worship him as He (narcissistically) demands. Rather, it is what the damned do to themselves in choosing themselves over God and self-giving love; it is the eternal effect of finally and completely rejecting God and cutting themselves off from Him.

God forgives the guilt (eternal punishment) we all incurred from our sin in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and faith in Christ's sacraments gives access to this forgiveness and to eternal life. As Jesus says, "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." (*Mark* 16:16)

Or if someone has been baptized, then she receives forgiveness by repenting and confessing her sins:

Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained. (*John* 20:23, see also, *Matthew* 18:18)

With venial sin, one still has the life of God in the soul because, while acting against God's will, she has not rejected God's friendship completely and totally. Such a person would still be in a state of grace and have God's life active in her soul, but that life is strained or weakened, but not dead. And so, a soul that dies with unconfessed venial sin does not lose salvation and heaven. But neither is that soul ready for heaven. Even if one receives complete and total absolution of the guilt of both mortal and venial sins in the Sacraments of Reconciliation

or Anointing of the Sick immediately before death, she may still not be ready for heaven because of the “burden and sin that clings to us.”

This is the other effect of sin: the damage it does to ourselves. This is called temporal punishment (as opposed to eternal punishment), and it remains with us temporal beings even after God has forgiven the guilt of both venial and mortal sins. Both mortal and venial sins attach us too much to things other than God – pleasure or power or revenge, love

of self over love of God. And this attachment isn’t a guilt that God forgives, but an impurity that must be cleansed, but it is cleansed also through God’s merciful grace. Again, as we are temporal beings, a temporal process is necessary to remove this impurity, either in this life or after death.

The secondary effect of sin is the damage it does to ourselves and is called temporal punishment. It is the impurity that must be cleansed with penance in this life or in purgatory in the next.

Purgatory is the temporary state after death wherein God’s grace purifies souls, and they are rid of the after-effects of bad choices. Thus, the reason there is purgatory is that we have to be made perfect, to love as God loves, in order to dwell with him in Heaven. Jesus tells us

So be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (*Matthew 5:48*)

And Scripture elsewhere says,

But nothing unclean shall enter [heaven] . . . (*Revelation 21:27*)

Indeed, the reason Jesus became man and died on the cross was not only to atone for our guilt, but also to allow and empower us to become perfect and pure, capable of sharing in God’s life. And the way we attain holiness and perfection is, in part, through penance – difficult or painful experiences endured out of love. As Jesus says,

If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (*Luke 9:23*)

Again, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, God disciplines us

for our benefit, in order that we may share his holiness . . . that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (*Hebrews* 12:10,14)

Holiness and perfection are necessary to see God in Heaven. We attain this holiness through the remission of temporal punishment by patiently enduring suffering and our own personal crosses.

Holiness and perfection, thus, are necessary to see God in Heaven. The holiness and perfection we attain comes through the remission of temporal punishment incurred due to venial, but especially mortal sins, and this purification comes through patiently enduring suffering and our own personal crosses, bearing them out of love as Christ did (and indeed with His grace).

Some people do attain perfect holiness in this life, i.e., the martyrs and saints (officially recognized by Church canonization, or not), and they go immediately to heaven when they die. But the souls who die in a state of grace and without mortal sin have been redeemed and forgiven by God's mercy given in Christ; as such, their eternal punishment is remitted. But they may still have to suffer the temporal punishment for their sin, and they cannot be admitted to heaven until they are sanctified and made perfect. Such souls have to be purified in purgatory.

Purgatory is the temporary state after death where temporal punishment, the damage to one's soul or character (which makes one a sensuous or an angry person, for example), is healed or cleansed away (i.e., purged as by fire) as that damage was meant to be healed by penances while a person was still alive.

Saint Paul tells us that on Judgment Day, the work a person has done,

will be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation (of Christ), that person will receive a wage [i.e., enter heaven]. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 *Corinthians* 3:13-15)

The soul in purgatory is saved by the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus from the guilt and estrangement from God which its sins justly deserve. But, while the soul is redeemed from guilt, it still may be imperfect, impure, and unclean. Purgatory is “where” this purging “as with fire” happens. Of course, this is metaphorical language for the very real spiritual realities of becoming purified and made holy through suffering.

Indulgences

The prayers and sufferings of Christians in the Body of Christ can help heal the spiritual hurt that others suffer. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.” (*Colossians* 1:24) Paul is not saying that Jesus did not suffer enough on the cross. Instead, he is saying that the Church, the body of Christ, needs to suffer the afflictions which purify it through Christ’s total suffering. Paul is able to make up for the sufferings that other members of the body of Christ still need to endure. He rejoices in what he suffers for the sake of others.

The Church, the body of Christ, needs to suffer the afflictions which purify it through Christ’s total suffering.

Likewise, Saint John tells us to pray that a fellow Christian who sins – but not mortally – be given life.

If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and he will give him life. This is only for those whose sin is not deadly. There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray. (1 *John* 5:16)

Deadly, that is, mortal, sin is not helped by prayers, but the other kind, venial sin, is.

Our ability in this life to help make up for the sufferings lacking in the Body of Christ applies even to those souls who are suffering the purification of purgatory. The Scripture that most clearly attests to this continuous tradition of the Church is just as controversial as the tradition itself, for it is contained in one of the books of the Greek Old Testament that was rejected by Martin Luther and Protestants in the 16th century (See above, **Catholics and the Bible**). Judas Maccabeus, upon discovering that his slain soldiers had been wearing forbidden

amulets of idols, “prayed that their sin might be fully blotted out” and had a sacrifice offered in Jerusalem on their behalf.

In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin (2 *Maccabees* 12:43-45).

Indulgences are the prayers and sufferings of fellow Christians in the Body of Christ that can help heal the spiritual hurt that others suffer.

The prayers and sacrifices of Judas Maccabeus made up for, “blotted out” or removed the temporal effects of the sins of his soldiers, Scripture tells us; if the sins had incurred damnation, i.e., eternal punishment, no amount of atoning actions by the Maccabee would have had any effect.

Only Christ’s sacrifice atones for the guilt of a person’s sin and restores that person to God’s grace and life; only through Christ is anyone saved. But through our prayers, sacrifices and sufferings, we can make atonement for the harmful effects other people’s sins have had on them and on the world. We can do this for others in this life, as Paul did, or we can make up for the afflictions they lack as they are purified after death in purgatory.

And, the prayers and sufferings of fellow Christians in the Body of Christ that can help heal the spiritual hurt that others suffer is administered by the authority of the Church. This is what the Church means by Indulgences. (CCC 1471)

To sum up:

Only Christ’s sacrifice atones for the guilt of a person’s sin (eternal punishment) and restores that person to God’s grace and life; only through Christ is anyone saved.

But through our prayers, sacrifices and sufferings, and most especially through those of Christ Himself and His saints, the whole Body of Christ (the Church)

can make atonement for the harmful effects, the temporal punishment, which our own or other people's sins have had on themselves and on the world. Indulgences are these prayers, sacrifices and sufferings of others that are applied to sinners in need of purification in this life or the next (in purgatory only, not hell). Saint Thérèse of Lisieux says, "when we love God our heart expands, and we can give incomparably more tender love to those who are dear to us than when our love is selfish and barren... Love is fed by and develops from sacrifice."

We can gain indulgences for others in this life through our own efforts, as Saint Paul did, or we can, through the merits of Jesus and the saints, make up for the afflictions lacking to the faithful departed and our loved ones as they are purified after death in purgatory. In this way, the Church offers indulgences (from a storehouse, as it were, of temporal merit) to faithful Christians for certain pious acts, which can then be applied to the suffering souls who need it.

We can gain indulgences for others in this life through our own efforts, or through the merits of Jesus and the saints, to aid the faithful departed as they are purified after death in purgatory.

Here are some of the spiritual practices you can do to gain a plenary indulgence (the full remission of all the temporal punishment) either for yourself or for a soul in purgatory. For a full list, see the *Enchiridion of Indulgences* issued by the Holy See (Vatican).

- Make special pilgrimages
- Pray during special years (Year for Priest, Jubilee Years (every 25 years)).
- Read the Bible for 30 minutes on any given day
- Pray the Rosary in public
- Pray for dead on All Souls' Day: attend Mass, visit a graveyard.

To gain a plenary indulgence, the following conditions have to be met:

- Attend Mass and receive communion on the day of doing the work
- Go to confession within a week of the work
- Pray for intentions of the Pope
- Be free of all attachment to sin.

This last condition doesn't mean you have to be perfectly holy (a living saint); you may still commit occasional venial sins, but you would not regularly commit serious or habitual sins.

This might be somewhat difficult, but even without meeting this requirement, you can still gain a partial (if not a plenary) indulgence. And the more you engage in selfless spiritual practices (gaining partial indulgences), the less you will be attached to sin, and so able eventually to gain plenary indulgences.

THE POPE: SIGN AND PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

Jesus chose Peter to lead the Apostles and his leadership would have a unique role in the foundation of His Church and in preserving the Gospel He handed on to them.

The pope is the bishop of Rome, the Church headed by the Apostle Peter before his martyrdom at the command of the Emperor Nero. It is clear in Scripture that Jesus chose Peter to lead the Apostles and that his leadership would have a unique role in the foundation of His Church and in preserving the Gospel He handed on to them.

[Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (*Matthew 16:15-19*).

Simon's confession of faith was inspired by God, and Jesus declares that this divine aid in taking hold of the truth makes Simon (and not just his faith) the rock foundation of the Church, so much so that Jesus changes Simon's name to the Rock (*Kephas* in Aramaic (see *John 1:42*) or *Petros* (Peter) in Greek). Jesus further gives to Peter the role of leadership among the apostles by telling him, "you must strengthen your brothers." (*Luke 22:32*) and "feed my sheep" (*John 21:15-19*). Peter continued to exercise this leadership in the life of the early

Church at the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts* 15), declaring what “we believe” (v. 11), even to the extent that the Church under his leadership can speak in the name of the Holy Spirit (v. 28).

The men who have succeeded Peter as the bishop of the Church in Rome continue to exercise the same leadership over the universal (i.e., Catholic) Church, even from the earliest times. For example, St. Clement (pope around the year 80 AD) exercised authority over the Church at Corinth, even though St. John the Apostle was still alive (*cf.* his *Letter to the Corinthians*).

The ministry of the pope guarantees the fidelity of the Church to Gospel that Jesus entrusted to the care of Peter and the Apostles. It is how Jesus fulfills the promise to preserve the Church in His truth.

The pope guarantees the fidelity of the Church to the Gospel entrusted to the care of Peter and the apostles.

I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. (*John* 16:12-13).

The guarantee of divine protection for the Church to profess and teach the truth is expressed in the doctrine of Papal Infallibility. This means that the pope cannot err when formally declaring matters of faith and morals, not because of his personal holiness or wisdom, but because of God’s special guidance.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

The unique, and privileged place of Jesus’ mother, Mary, among His disciples is also clearly presented in Scripture. The angel Gabriel, in announcing that she would play a special role of bringing Christ and His redemption to the world addresses her, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you” (*Luke* 1:28) and tells her, “you have found favor with God” (*Luke* 1:30). The special favor and grace that God gave her is confirmed in the exchange with her cousin, Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (*Luke* 1:41-43)

And Mary said: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (*Luke 1:46-49*).

Mary was blessed by God in this unique way in order that she would be worthy to bear in herself, and raise as a human boy, the Son of God.

To become the mother of the Savior, Mary “was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.” The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as “full of grace”. In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace. (CCC 490)

In order to be the Mother of the Son of God who would redeem the world from sin, she was kept free from sin by the very redemption her Son would bring about on the cross.

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854: The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin. (CCC 491)

The honor given to Mary, the Mother of God, should not be confused with the worship which is reserved for God alone.

The honor given to Mary, the Mother of God, should not be confused with the worship which is reserved for God alone. The Church honors her for the grace God showed her in preserving her from sin, in choosing her to be the earthly mother of His Son, and her obedience to and faith in

His word. We also ask for her to pray to God on our behalf. But the Church never offers her praise, adoration, sacrifice, or worship; all of the honor given to her is on account of the favor God showed her.

The Church rightly honors the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of ‘Mother of God,’ to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs. . . . This very special devotion . . . differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration. (CCC 971)

PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

In addition to benefitting from the prayers of other Christians on earth, we Catholics believe that we can also be helped by the prayers of those who have been made perfect in following Christ, the saints in heaven. It is clear that we should pray, and ask for the prayers, of each other.

First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human. (1 *Timothy* 2:1-5).

But since all who follow Christ are bound together as His Body, the saints who have gone before us are in an especially good position to present our prayers and petitions to God. If it is good and pleasing to pray for each other here on earth, so much more can those in the presence of God in heaven hear and present our prayers on our behalf. As it says in Revelations, the saints in heaven offer our prayers to God under the form of “gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones.” (5:8)

Since all who follow Christ are bound together as His Body, the saints who have gone before us are in an especially good position to present our prayers and petitions to God.

CATHOLIC APOLOGETICS

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:15-16)

Please scan the QR code to find resources explaining some basic, often misunderstood, teachings about God, Jesus, and the Holy Catholic Church. This is for anyone who wants to learn about them for themselves or to explain and defend their truth to others.



Topics covered include:

Answering Objections to God (His Existence and Nature)

- Is There Evidence that God exists?
 - Argument from Contingency
 - Argument from Perfection
 - Argument from Orderliness (including Science)
- Does God Need to Have a Cause?
- How Can We Know the First Cause of the Universe Is God?
- Why Does a Good God Allow Evil?
- Does God's Omniscience Mean There Is No Free Will?
- Does Science Prove There Is No God?

Answering Questions about Jesus

- Was Jesus an Historical Person or Just a Myth?
- Are the Gospels Reliable Historical Records?
- How Is Jesus the Son of God?
- Why Did Jesus Die on the Cross?
- Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?
- What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?
- How Can an All-Good God Punish People Eternally in Hell?

Answering Objections to the Catholic Faith

- *Catholic Scriptural Reference Guide*
 - An extensive list of Scripture passages, topically arranged, supporting Catholic belief and practice.