



Saint Cecilia Catechism

Compiled by: Rev. David Justin Lynch

Saint Cecilia Catholic Community

555 North Commercial Road Ste 1

Palm Springs CA 92262

760-778-8950

www.saintceciacatholiccommunity.org

INTRODUCTION

This Catechism is intended as a basic statement of the Catholic Faith in the Old Catholic Tradition. It was meant for the instruction of the laity, particularly children, youth, and those new to Catholic Christianity. It is not intended as a research document for theologians to pick apart and criticize.

I have followed the traditional question-and-answer format of many catechisms. However, one should remember that the answers given here may not be the only answers to the questions presented, and that those learning from this catechism can be expected to formulate questions of their own. Both the questions and the answers are intended to stimulate further thinking and discussion. Catechists using this booklet should encourage their students to expand on the given answers and to do their own research and formulate their own answers.

In learning the faith as herein presented, one must remember that the revelation of God and our knowledge of God is forever ongoing. Hence, the material herein should be seen as a commencement of a journey rather than a destination. Religious truth as we know it is neither set in stone nor from a single point of origin. Rather, it is an ongoing, infinite discovery that will never end. Hence, both those who instruct, and those who learn from this catechism should not consider religious doctrine as a closed book. To do so is a fruitless attempt to confine the Holy Spirit into a box with dimensions and construction of our choosing; when that happens, the Holy Spirit loses Her freedom to bestow sanctifying grace on human lives.

I invite your criticisms and suggestions as this catechism is intended to be an ongoing project that will attempt to keep up with the unstoppable development of the relationship between God and humanity. I emphasize "attempt," as no one will ever stay totally abreast of all happening between God and humanity. But we can try.

Rev. David Justin Lynch

The Saint Cecilia Catechism

Contents

1. Human Nature.....	4
2. God the Father	7
3. The Old Covenant.....	9
4. The Ten Commandments.....	11
5. Sin and Redemption.....	14
6. God the Son.....	18
7. The New Covenant.....	21
8. The Creeds	23
9. The Holy Spirit.....	25
10. The Holy Scriptures.....	28
11. The Church	31
12. The Ministry	35
13. Prayer and Worship	38
14. The Sacraments.....	42
15. Holy Baptism	45
16. The Holy Eucharist	48
17. Confirmation	51
18. Ordination (Holy Orders)	53
19. Marriage (Holy Matrimony).....	56
20. Reconciliation.....	58
21. Holy Unction (Holy Anointing)	60
22. Other Rites and Ceremonies.....	62
23. Christian Living.....	63
24. The Christian Hope.....	67

1. Human Nature

"What does it mean to be a human being?" This question is followed by the personal question, "Who am I in this world?" We ask this again and again. And we hear a voice from deep inside us that tells us that we are more than we see. We are part of the glory of the universe, and within the fabric of the universe there is a presence we call "God." God is not simply a force, but is in relationship with us – God loves us. This love is real, despite the troubles and suffering we feel in life. This is the first message of the Christian faith: we are made in the image of God, and in this image we are capable of love. Yet we are also capable of creating pain and suffering ourselves. This is the mystery of human life – and it is all part of the message of the Church, the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ. We explore the meaning of human nature in the lessons of the catechism. Each answer is a starting point of the conversation, and not a final answer.

We find our lives to be a mixture of those desires to love, and other desires that are selfish – which do not consider the lives of other people as we promote our own lives. Sometimes we do things that are good for us, but harm others. This seems to be part of the harsh world of nature which serves the law of the strong overcoming the weak. Still, there is another power at work in us. This is the power of love that serves others. It has been fully revealed by Jesus in his life and teaching. The way of Jesus is the way of faith. And faith is as much about the faithfulness of Jesus, which he pledges to us: "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." (Matthew 7:7)

We develop in our understanding of faith, life, and our own sense of identity – this is also human nature. Saint Paul wrote these words about growth: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways." (1 Corinthians 13:11. These words remind us that we will also grow and change in our understanding of faith – beyond the answers of the past.

Q. What is a human person?

A. The human person is an individual creature, distinguished from all other creatures by the gift of freedom, bodily incarnated, and animated by a spiritual principle, traditionally called a soul.

Q. What are we by nature?

A. As children of God, our lives are sacred, part of God's creation, made in the image of God.

Q. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

A. It means that we are composed of mind, emotions and will, sentient and self-aware, with an instinctive capacity to develop and appreciate music, drama, art and story in all its forms, and free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.

Q. Why then do we live apart from God and out of harmony with creation?

A. From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices due to the presence of evil in the universe.

Q. What is freedom?

A. Freedom is a state of being wherein a person may make choices in the absence of compulsion.

Q. What is evil?

A. Evil is the absence of good.

Q. How did evil enter the world?

A. Evil entered the world by the deliberate choices of human persons.

Q. Why does God allow evil?

A. God permits evil because he respects the freedom of His creatures and knows how to derive good from it.

Q. Why do we not use our freedom as we should?

A. Because we are weak by nature, we rebel against God and other persons by placing ourselves ahead of God and the needs, rights and wants of other persons, mistakenly believing we are sufficient unto ourselves and in control of our own destiny.

Q. What help is there for us?

A. Our help is in God, our creator, redeemer and sanctifier.

Q. How did God first help us?

A. God first helped us by revealing Himself and His will, through nature and history, through many seers and saints, and especially through the prophets of Israel.

2. God the Father

God as "father" is criticized by some as too sexist and patriarchal. Yet, the fatherhood of God is archetypal, as ancient mythic stories sometimes speak of "father-god" and "mother-earth," when the seed of life is planted in the womb of the earth. The 3700 year Hebrew tradition, shared by Jews and Christians, knows God as father. A father brings life, just as a mother. The name "father" suggests an initiator of life, as well as a protector and a guide. Skeptics say that God does not protect people, and therefore conclude that God is just an idea. Yet religion persists, and is vibrant among those who have little – the poor, the marginalized and the enslaved. They experience a profound and powerful presence in their lives – the Father of comfort and hope.

In the Jewish tradition, Jesus called God, "My Father." He taught his disciples that they should be one in him, as he is one with the Father. Thus, his disciples knew of Jesus' devotion to the Father. Jesus is distinct from the Father, yet Jesus also taught that, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works." (John 14: 9-10)

Still, psychologically, people experience fatherhood as:

- 1. Comforting because of emotional experiences of the comfort of a human father.*
- 2. Troubling because of harsh experiences of a human father.*
- 3. Profound because of deep experiences of an embracing presence of God in their lives – especially at times of crises.*

The Christian image of the Father is given in this passage: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God." (2 Corinthians 1: 3-4.)

Q. What do we learn about God as creator from the revelation to Israel?

A. We learn that there is but one God, creator of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

Q. What does this mean?

A. This means that the universe is good, that it is the work of a single loving God who creates, sustains, nurtures, and directs it.

Q. What does this mean about our place in the universe?

A. It means that the world belongs to its creator; and that we are called to enjoy it and to care for it in accordance with God's purposes.

Q. What does this mean about human life?

A. It means that all people are worthy of respect and honor, because all are created in the image of God, and all can respond to the love of God.

Q. How was this revelation handed down to us?

A. This revelation was handed down to us through a community created by a covenant with God.

Q. What are the characteristics of God?

A. God is love, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Q. How do we experience God?

A. We experience God in ourselves, in community with other persons, and in all of creation.

3. The Old Covenant

A covenant is a fixed relationship between two people. In the ancient world, the covenant was often an agreement made between a stronger king and a lesser tribe or nation. This was called a suzerainty treaty, and if it was made by people in a family or tribal situation, the relationship between the two parties was often described as one between "father" and "son."

The Jewish scriptures are often called the Old Testament by Christians, and the relationship between God and the Hebrew people is called the "Old Covenant" by Christian writers. It is a relationship between God as the almighty and the People of Israel, the Hebrews. For them, God is both Father and Mighty Lord. The relationship is one of mutual agreement. God will be faithful to his people, and the people will be faithful to God by the observance of his commandments – the stipulations of the agreement. The agreement begins with these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:2) Then the agreement gives the stipulations that the Hebrew people are to observe – commandments that have been honored by Jewish people throughout history until the present time. These are commonly called the 10 Commandments.

Yet, the most important part of observing the commandments is remembering that they follow the initial mutual pledge of love and loyalty between God and his people - based upon the power of God that freed the Hebrew people from slavery. The commandments honor their liberty, their dignity and their self-determination. They are to be led by God, not selfish desires or earthly political assurances. This covenant has been the promise that sustained the Jewish people through terrible persecutions and continuous prejudice for many centuries.

The New Covenant in Jesus Christ builds upon this covenant with the Hebrew people, and fulfills its promise of freedom in a new way – freedom from the illusion of sin, and the terror of death.

Q. What is meant by a covenant with God?

A. A covenant is a relationship of faithfulness initiated by God, to which a body of people responds in faith.

Q. What is the Old Covenant?

A. The Old Covenant is the one given by God to the Hebrew people.

Q. What did God promise them?

A. God promised that they would be his people to bring all the nations of the world to Him.

Q. What response did God require from the chosen people?

A. God required the chosen people to be faithful; to love justice, to do mercy, and to walk humbly with their God. (Micah 6:8)

Q. Where is this Old Covenant to be found?

A. The covenant with the Hebrew people is to be found in the books which we call the Old Testament.

Q. Where in the Old Testament is God's will for us shown most clearly?

A. God's will for us is shown most clearly in the Ten Commandments found in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy.

4. The Ten Commandments

The Book of Exodus tells of God freeing the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt through Moses the prophet. God made a covenant with his people, asking them to observe laws to insure their dignity and sense of justice. Here is a text of those commandments:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:2-17)

Q. What are the Ten Commandments?

A. The Ten Commandments are the laws given to Moses and the people of Israel.

Q. What do we learn from these commandments?

A. We learn two things: our duty to God, and our duty to our neighbors.

Q. What is our duty to God?

A. Our duty is to believe and trust in God; to love and obey God and to bring others to know God; to put nothing in the place of God; to show God respect in thought, word, and deed; to be good stewards of the riches of creation; and to set aside regular times for worship, prayer, and the study of God's ways.

Q. What is our duty to our neighbors?

A. Our duty to our neighbors is to love them as ourselves, and to do to other people as we wish them to do to us; to love, honor, and help our parents and family; to honor those in authority in an appropriate way, and to meet their just demands to the best of our ability and when consistent with our conscience; to show respect for all life; to work and pray for peace; to bear no malice, prejudice, or hatred in our hearts; and to be kind to all the creatures of God; to use all our bodily desires as God intended; to be honest and fair in our dealings; to seek justice, freedom, peace, and the necessities of life for all people; to use our talents and possessions as ones who must answer for them to God; to speak the truth, and not to mislead others by our silence; to resist temptations to envy, greed, and jealousy; to rejoice in other people's gifts and graces; and to do our duty for the love of God, who has called us into fellowship with Him.

Q. Who are your neighbors?

A. All human persons are your neighbors.

Q. What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?

A. The Ten Commandments were given to define our relationship with God and our neighbors.

Q. Since we do not fully obey them, are they useful at all?

A. Even though we do not fully obey them, they are guideposts for our behavior to help us love God and our neighbor and to thus see where we fail to meet God's expectations for us and our consequent need for redemption.

5. Sin and Redemption

Sin is a very unpopular word in our society. People do not like to think in terms of sinfulness and holiness. Sin is usually interpreted as breaking a law of God that is found in the bible. Yet sin has a definition from the bible, in Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. Saint Paul uses the Greek word, "hamartia" to describe sin, which means to fall short – like an arrow that does not reach its target. Saint Paul writes: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) The term "hamartia" was used in Greek drama to describe a tragic flaw in a character being portrayed. It was a deficit in that character that makes him or her incomplete – falling short of a virtuous goal. And it gave the audience a sense of sadness – a tragedy.

Sin is a concept that is accepted in many cultures of the world. In India it is a concept that is explained as illusory and fleeting. The teachings of the ancient sages of India express the idea that all of life is clouded by "avidya" and "maya." This is ignorance and illusion. Buddhists express similar ideas that life is impermanent, and that selfishness plants itself as a seed to control the future against change that we do not want. They too teach that a cause of suffering is ignorance – which produces greed and selfish desire.

The traditional term "original sin" is often mistakenly interpreted to mean we are born personally guilty – born "bad." (This feels so offensive when we apply it to babies being baptized.) Yet the term actually means something like a "pre-existing condition" into which we are all born. While everyone bears the consequence of "original" or "birth" sin, only Adam and Eve bear the guilt for it. Original sin is more like a flaw that manifests itself in human life, no matter how much we strive to improve ourselves. Original sin is a tendency toward selfishness, and an original ignorance about our true nature: that we are made in the image of God. In this, we "fall short" of God's image when love and compassion are not primary in our minds and hearts – and in our actions.

The great English writer, G.K. Chesterton, said that original sin is the only doctrine of the Church for which there is empirical evidence. He meant that we simply need to look at the violence, suffering and lack of compassion in the world to know that such a fatal flaw exists in the human character.

We discuss the "mystery" of sin and selfishness to help us understand the source of so much human suffering. Yet the Christian is called not to focus on sin, but on the power of Jesus Christ to help us heal our wounds, reconcile differences with others, and look past the haze of human ignorance to the truth of God. True Christian faith focuses not on sin, but on God's presence in our hearts, and the guidance of God's Spirit in our lives.

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is not meeting God's expectations of us.

Q. What causes sin?

A. Sin has three causes: the inborn weakness of human nature; ignorance of God's ways; and by voluntary, knowing and intentional acts to follow our own desires in contradiction to God's will for us.

Q. What are the seven most serious sins?

A. The seven most serious sins are pride, envy, greed, lust, wrath, gluttony, and sloth.

Q. What is pride?

A. Pride is an unrealistic and arrogant belief in one's own abilities that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God.

Q. What is envy?

A. Envy is the desire for others' assets, traits, status, abilities, or situation.

Q. What is greed?

A. Greed is the desire for material wealth or gain for their own sake beyond that necessary for reasonable survival and that ignores the spiritual realm.

Q. What is lust?

A. Lust is the inordinate craving of physical pleasure in a manner harmful to oneself or others.

Q. What is wrath?

A. Wrath is uncontrollable hate towards another person or group of persons.

Q. What is gluttony?

A. Gluttony is consumption of food or drink beyond that necessary for healthy survival.

Q. What is sloth?

A. Sloth is the apathetic failure to perform our duties to ourselves or others.

Q. What is the ultimate of all sins?

A. The ultimate of all sins is idolatry.

Q. What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is the worship of some thing or person instead of God.

Q. What is the effect of sin?

A. Sin separates humanity from God.

Q. How does sin have power over us?

A. Sin has power over us because our state of being and our personal fault due to the presence of evil in the world whereby we lose our liberty, causing our relationship with God to be distorted.

Q. What is the sin of Adam?

A. Adam disobeyed God.

Q. What is the effect of Adam's sin for us?

A. While not bearing the guilt for Adam's sin, humanity bears the consequence of Adam's sin because we thereby become subject to death.

Q. What is redemption?

A. Redemption is restoration of a right relationship with God by the truth revealed in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus which set us free from the power of evil, sin, and death.

Q. How did God prepare us for redemption?

A. God sent the prophets to call us back to himself, to show us our need for redemption, and to announce the coming of the Messiah.

Q. What is meant by the Messiah?

A. The Messiah is the Anointed One sent by God to free us from the power of sin, so that with the help of God we may live in harmony with God, within ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.

Q. Whom do we believe is the Messiah?

A. The Messiah, or Christ, is Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God.

6. God the Son

Jesus is center of Christian faith. All doctrines of the Church are commentaries on Christ. His life and teaching are the compelling story which moves us to believe in him. We find his truth in our lives: simple trust in God, forgiveness of each other, compassion for those in need, etc. And Jesus' disciples quickly came to understand him as the expected Messiah who is also divine – the Son of God. Their devotion to Jesus included the title "Christ," which means "anointed." This Greek term is the equivalent of "Messiah." The Jewish people expected a coming Messiah to free them from bondage and suffering, heal the people and restore God's supreme authority.

Jesus referred to himself as "the Son of Man." By this he referred to the Book of Daniel, from the Old Testament. In that book, Daniel is a prophet who has a vision of four world kingdoms in human history, and the replacement of all human power with the kingdom of God. He sees the final coming of a divine figure who approaches the throne of God:

"As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed." (Daniel 7: 13-14)

The followers of Jesus soon discovered, by his death and resurrection, that the kingdom of God is beyond human political power – a final triumph over ignorance and greed, and the way to eternal life "in Christ." Jesus taught: "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21) The kingdom is in us, and between us, in our love, understanding and pursuit of peace. Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his followers on a number of occasions before ascending to the Father. But his resurrected presence is also now with us in many ways – as we gather in his name, in the Eucharist (Holy Communion), in the love we show to those in need, in his teachings, etc.

Finally, Jesus revealed the way to the kingdom with these words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) This is wrongly interpreted to mean that Jesus is condemning those who are not Christian. Rather, it means Jesus embodies the kingdom of God. In Jesus we encounter God.

Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is the only Son of God?

A. We mean that Jesus, the only perfect image of God, shows us the nature of God.

Q. What is the nature of God revealed in Jesus?

A. God is love, evidenced by compassion, peace, and justice.

Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary?

A. We mean that by God's own act, his divine Son received our human nature from the Virgin Mary, his mother.

Q. Why did he take our human nature?

A. The divine Son became human, so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God, and be made heirs of God's kingdom.

Q. Is Jesus divine or human?

A. Jesus is fully and perfectly divine and fully and perfectly human, co-essential and co-equal to God the Father, existing with God the Father from the beginning of time. The divine and human natures of Jesus are inseparable.

Q. What is the great importance of Jesus' suffering and death?

A. Jesus showed his absolute love for humankind by undergoing suffering and death, giving up his own life so that we might be freed from the power of sin and reconciled to God.

Q. Did Jesus actually rise from the dead?

A. Because we do not know how the resurrection of Jesus was accomplished, it remains a mystery, and we affirm that Jesus continues to live among us as His resurrected body.

Q. What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection?

A. By his resurrection, Jesus triumphed over death and opened for us the way of eternal life.

Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus descended to the dead?

A. We mean that he went to the departed and freed them from bondage and bestow on them also the benefits of redemption.

Q. What do we mean when we say that He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

A. We mean that Jesus took our human nature into heaven where He now reigns with the Father and intercedes for us.

Q. How can we share in His victory over sin, suffering, and death?

A. We share in his victory when we are baptized into the New Covenant and become living members of Christ working for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

7. The New Covenant

The Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament) tell the long story of God's covenants with the ancient prophets. God made a covenant with Abraham, and later with Moses and the Hebrew people – which we commonly refer to as the Ten Commandments. Jeremiah was a prophet who lived more than 500 years before the Lord Jesus. Here are his words about a "new covenant" for God's people:

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

Jesus observed the covenant that the Jewish people celebrated because he was Jewish. He established a new covenant at the last supper that he shared with his disciples on the night before he died:

"Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Luke 22:19-20)

Jesus is the new covenant with God, and we are one with him – we are "in Christ." He is the Son of God, we share in his "son-ship." We share in the divinity of Christ as daughters and sons of God. We are filled with the presence of God, and become Jesus' presence in the world. With the New Covenant, Jesus gave us a New Commandment:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

The New Covenant is the kingdom of God – Christ present with us. It is easily recognized when we love one another, and serve each other's needs. Yet, it is to be fulfilled in another age, at the coming of Jesus in glory: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.: (1 Corinthians 15:28)

Q. What is the New Covenant?

A. The New Covenant is the new relationship with God given by Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to the apostles; and, through them, to all who believe in him.

Q. What did the Messiah promise in the New Covenant?

A. Christ promised to establish God's kingdom on earth and to bring us into the kingdom of God, through God, with God and in God.

Q. What response did Christ require?

A. Christ commanded us to believe in him and to keep His commandments.

Q. What are the commandments taught by Christ?

A. Christ taught us the Summary of the Law and gave us the New Commandment.

Q. What is the Summary of the Law?

A. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and the great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Q. What is the New Commandment?

A. The New Commandment is that we love one another as Christ loved us.

Q. Where may we find what Christians believe about Christ?

A. What Christians believe about Christ is found in the Scriptures, in the traditions of the Church, and summed up in the creeds.

8. The Creeds

The word "creed" comes from the Latin word "credo," meaning "I believe." The earliest creeds were part of the baptism ritual, and simple creeds were declarations by Christians against the oppression of the Roman authorities. "Jesus is Lord" was such a declaration, contrary to the requirement of Roman government that all declare: "Caesar is Lord."

In 313, Christianity was finally legalized in the Roman Empire, and in 325 the Emperor Constantine called all Christian bishops to meet in Nicaea (present-day Turkey). He wanted them to create a clear statement of the Christian faith. Later councils would develop this first creed. In 381, the First Council of Constantinople (modern Istanbul) issued a creed now generally used in Christian mainline Churches today. A common version is:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The creed is an authentic description of what Christians believe. It is not the same as the actual experience of faith – which is a vibrant relationship with God through a life in the Church, the community of faith. Sincere faith is lived through prayer, service and interaction with other Christians. The creed is a guiding light in the Christian life that allows us to align ourselves with the wisdom and strength of that faith.

Q. What are the creeds?

A. The creeds are authoritative statements of basic statements about God held in common among catholic Christians recited or sung collectively by faith communities to strengthen their identity as one in Christ.

Q. What do we mean we say we believe in God?

A. When we say we believe in God, we affirm our loyalty to God and our trust in God.

Q. How many creeds does this Church use in its teaching?

A. This Church uses two creeds: The Apostles' Creed, and the Nicene Creed.

Q. What is the Apostles' Creed?

A. The Apostles' Creed is the ancient creed of Baptism; it is used to recall our Baptismal Covenant.

Q. What is the Nicene Creed?

A. The Nicene Creed is the creed of the universal Church.

Q. What is the Trinity?

A. The Trinity is one God in three persons, equal to one another in every respect: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, all perpetually present within one another and in the entire universe from the beginning of time.

9. The Holy Spirit

Jesus' followers quickly came to believe in him as God, but struggled with this because they were Jewish – believing in only one God. They knew he prayed to the Father, and promised to send the Holy Spirit. Intuitively, they came to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: three persons in one God. The Father is the Source, Jesus is his only-begotten Son, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father by the life and ministry of the Son. Jesus is "incarnate" by the Holy Spirit – became a human being by the power of Spirit.

We have considered the roles of the Father and the Son, and now turn to the mission of the Holy Spirit. Christians try to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer, the thoughts of other Christians, the Eucharist and sacraments, studying the scriptures, and signs around us of the movement of the Spirit. As we grow in faith, we learn to read the Spirit's guidance.

The Spirit also guides the Church as a whole. The Church is the Body of Christ, led by the Spirit, just as Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert experience that prepared him for his ministry (Matthew 4:1 or Luke 4:1)

Jesus taught his disciples about the Holy Spirit with these words:

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14: 25-27)

The gender of the Holy Spirit is as matter of opinion on which there is not agreement. Many picture the Spirit like a mother bird hovering over her chicks. Other images of the Spirit include a wind or fire. The Spirit came upon the Blessed Mother Mary as she conceived the Lord Jesus. And the Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21). The Spirit inspired the scriptures, and we call upon the Spirit at Mass to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. We are filled with the Holy Spirit at baptism and sealed in the Spirit at confirmation. Saint Paul wrote this about the Holy Spirit:

"To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,... All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses." (1 Corinthians 12:8-9 & 11)

Q. Who is the Holy Spirit?

A. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, God omnipresent at work in the world and in the Church even now.

Q. How is the Holy Spirit revealed in the Old Covenant?

A. The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Old Covenant as the giver of life at the beginning of creation, the One who spoke through the prophets.

Q. How is the Holy Spirit revealed in the New Covenant?

A. The Holy Spirit is revealed as the Lord who leads us into all truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ.

Q. How do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

A. We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.

Q. How do we recognize the truths taught by the Holy Spirit?

A. We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures, the tradition of the Church, and God's ongoing revelation to humankind.

Q. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

A. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord.

Q. What is wisdom?

A. Wisdom is the order and harmony of the universe, the subject of an ongoing revelation by God and ongoing discovery by humankind.

Q. What is understanding?

A. Understanding is a profound insight into the characteristics of God and creation.

Q. What is counsel?

A. Counsel is judging correctly what we should do in a particular circumstance.

Q. What is knowledge?

A. Knowledge is the ability to see the circumstances of our life as God sees them.

Q. What is fortitude?

A. Fortitude is determined moral courage against evil.

Q. What is piety?

A. Piety is instinctive affection for God that make us desire to worship.

Q. What is fear of the Lord?

A. Fear of the Lord is a realization of the all-pervading presence of God to which is owed our reverence.

10. The Holy Scriptures

There is a great deal of disagreement about the Bible because people interpret their texts and meaning differently. Some insist on a literal interpretation of all scripture, while others are on the opposite end of the spectrum, and very skeptical about the events of the scripture. The truth is in the middle because the scriptures are actually different kinds of literature. Scriptures like Genesis are more in the genre of ancient archetypal stories created before they were recorded. The Psalms were poetic hymns and chants used in worship and national celebrations. There are historical books in the Hebrew literature of the Old Testament, and Wisdom books that teach the discernment of our thinking and behavior – advice to the next generation. The writings of the prophets are messages of warning in the images of war, marriage and other symbolic explanations that call the people to be faithful to God.

The New Testament is comprised of the records of the first Christians about the life and teaching of Jesus. They are meant as an explanation of his ministry and his identity as Messiah. Additionally, there are letters from various writers to the Christian communities around the Mediterranean Sea. Some of the names of these writers are well known: Paul, Peter, James, etc.

The scriptures, and particularly the New Testament, give a foundation to the history of the Church because they describe the Jewish context of the story of Jesus, and the life of the early Christians: their faith, practices and struggles. The New Testament is set in the context of the domination of the Roman Empire over Israel (Palestine) and the Mediterranean world at the time of Jesus and the first Christian communities. They are the principle guide for the Church in its teaching, worship and practices, as well as its governance. They form the foundation of Christian theology.

When we read the scriptures, we are not just reading for information. Instead, we read with a hope of wisdom – a deeper understanding of the message of Jesus (the Gospel) and the meaning of life from a Christian perspective. We read for transformation, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may learn such wisdom from our reading and meditation.

The beautiful instruction to the deacon at ordination is useful to everyone in studying the scriptures, and particularly the New Testament:

"Believe what you read; teach what you believe; practice what you teach."

Q. What are the Holy Scriptures?

A. The Holy Scriptures, commonly called the Bible, are the books of the Old and New Testaments.

Q. What is the Old Testament?

A. The Old Testament consists of books written by the people of the Old Covenant, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to show God at work in nature and history.

Q. What are the books of the Old Testament?

A. The Books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi.

Q. What is the New Testament?

A. The New Testament consists of books written by the people of the New Covenant, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to set forth the life and teachings of Jesus and to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom for all people.

Q. What are the books of the New Testament?

A. The books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

Q. Why do we call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God?

A. The Holy Scriptures, the Word of God addressed to a particular people at a particular time in a particular place, are the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible.

Q. How do we understand the meaning of the Bible?

A. We understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the true interpretation of the Scriptures.

Q. What are the Four Senses of Scripture?

A. The Four Senses of Scripture are literal, allegorical, moral, and estachological.

Q. Is scripture literally true?

A. Some events of scripture are history, while others are meant as poetry or drama. Much of the writing of the New Testament was actually letters sent to Christian communities. While the events recounted in scripture may or may not have actually happened because its books differ in their kind and degree of accuracy, the meaning of the text contains eternal truth.

Q. What is the allegorical sense of scripture?

A. The allegorical sense of scripture has the persons, places, and events in scripture to acquire spiritual significance so as to reveal the inner truth of words of scripture.

Q. What is the moral sense of scripture?

A. The moral, or tropological, sense of scripture conveys its practical usefulness to our lives.

Q. What is the eschatological sense of scripture?

A. The eschatological, or anagogic, sense of scripture shows its relationship to the final end of time.

11. The Church

The Church is best described as a mystery because it is meant to be experienced in order to be truly known. Like Jesus' parables of the kingdom, the Church is compared to a field where a farmer sows seed; or it is compared to a boat which provides safety in the stormy sea. It is called the Pilgrim People – like the ancient Hebrew people crossing the desert from the slavery of Egypt to the Promised Land of Israel. It is the Body of Christ. It is a structure with Christ as the foundation.

Yet the Church is also a human institution, with the scandals and problems of all such institutions. It is divine in its origin and filled with God's grace, but it is also fragile and filled with people who make mistakes and sin against others through their own greed and ignorance. Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church. (Matthew 16:18)

The Church developed and grew strong in the places and times that it was made to exist alongside other religious traditions and philosophies. Its message of the Gospel was preached in lands that were not Christian, and it took root, resonating with millions of converts. When the Church aligns itself with secular powers or money interests it grew corrupt and lost the glorious power of its message. It sometimes became a stumbling block to the faith of the people when it used coercion or political pressure to make people bend to the will of its leadership.

Yet the Lord always sends reformers to the Church, like the great Saint Francis of Assisi. He had a vision in which Jesus appeared to him and said, "Repair my Church." At first, Francis thought that he was to repair a small and abandoned church building that he would sometimes visit. But soon he came to realize that God wanted him to call the Church back to the simplicity of the message of Christ, and thousands followed him as Franciscan friars.

The Church is given an eternal message and mission in these verses:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

The great cloud of witnesses, the communion of saints, have lived the life of faith in many ages, and call to us to persevere, with hope in the Lord.

Q. What is the Church?

A. The Church is the community of the New Covenant with its members interdependent on one another existing in a sacramental universe and mediating between God and humankind.

Q. How is the Church described in the Bible?

A. The Church is the People of God, the New Israel, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and the pillar and ground of truth, the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members.

Q. How is the Church described in the creeds?

A. The Church is described as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

Q. Why is the Church described as one?

A. The Church is one, because it is one Body, under one Head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. Why is the Church described as holy?

A. The Church is holy, because the Holy Spirit dwells in it, consecrates its members, and guides them to do God's work.

Q. Why is the Church described as catholic?

A. The Church is catholic, because it proclaims the whole Faith to all people, to the end of time, based on scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

Q. Why is the Church described as apostolic?

A. The Church is apostolic, because it continues in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles and is sent to carry out Christ's mission to all people.

Q. What is the mission of the Church?

A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ and to proclaim the establishment of God's Kingdom of justice, peace, and compassion on earth as it is in heaven.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?

A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, administers the Sacraments, and promotes justice, peace, and compassion.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members, without discrimination as to gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, or any other immutable characteristic.

Q. Is the Church identical with any particular denomination?

A. No, the Church is the body of all baptized believers in Christ, and any congregation of faithful Christians in which the Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are duly administered, is a true part of the visible Church of Christ.

Q. Does the Church have any visible head on earth apart from Jesus Christ?

A. No, there is no single member of the Church who is the head of the Church (apart from Jesus Christ), nor does any member have universal jurisdiction, nor can anyone speak infallibly regarding any matter of faith or morals, but a unanimous universal council of all bishops can speak with unerring authority. However, Catholics look to the Bishop of Rome as a living sign of the worldwide unity of the Church.

Q. Who is the model of the Church?

A. Mary, the Mother of God, is the model of the Church through her cooperation with God's plan of salvation in her assent to the Annunciation, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to your Word."

Q. What is the role of the Church in Christian life?

A. The role of the Church is the life of a Christian is to provide a community through which persons relate to God; to mediate the relationship between God and humanity; and to sanctify human existence.

Q. What are the Ecumenical Councils?

A. The Ecumenical Councils were seven meetings of bishops of the undivided early Church, before the Great Schism.

Q. What did the First Ecumenical Council teach?

A. The First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325 established the doctrine concerning the relationship between Jesus and God the Father, which was formulated into the first version of the Nicene Creed.

Q. What did the Second Ecumenical Council teach?

A. The Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381 finished the Nicene Creed.

Q. What did the Third Ecumenical Council teach?

A. The Second Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 proclaimed that Mary was Theotokos, or Mother of God.

Q. What did the Fourth Ecumenical Council teach?

A. The Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 described and delineated the "Hypostatic Union" and two natures of Christ, human and divine.

Q. What did the Fifth Ecumenical Council teach?

A. The Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 condemned the notion that there are two separate persons in the Incarnation of Christ.

Q. What did the Sixth Ecumenical Council teach?

A. The Sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 681 affirmed that Jesus had both human and divine wills.

Q. What did the Seventh Ecumenical Council teach?

A. The Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 787 declared that icons were not idols and could be venerated.

12. The Ministry

In the early Church, bishops were elected by the people they were to serve. Even in Rome, bishops were reviewed by the clergy and elected by the people. Pope Celestine I (423-432) wrote "Let no bishop be given to a community against its will; the consent and desire of the clergy, people, and nobility is required." Pope Leo the Great (440-461) wrote "No consideration allows making bishops of those who have not been chosen by the clerics, sought for by the people, and consecrated by the provincial bishops with the consent of the senior bishop."

Yet, the structure of the Church was consistent by the year 100. Each community of faith was led by a bishop, who was assisted by presbyters (priests) who often went to outlying communities to serve the sacramental needs of those who were far from the central community. Deacons were the ministers who served the administrative needs and the needs of the poor.

Father Richard McBrien, who taught at Notre Dame University in Indiana, wrote this about Church governance in the third century:

"In fact, the whole Church community took part in the election of bishops and the choice of ministers. Even though the early Church already possessed a firm canonical structure, it also wanted to be ready for any movement prompted by the Holy Spirit. And so the intervention of the laity was welcomed as a matter of principle. But the Church also regarded the bishop as possessed of the gifts of the Spirit in a preeminent way. It was because of the apparent presence of these gifts that one was chosen a bishop in the first place." (Catholicism, pp. 744-745)

Yet the ministers of the Church are called to listen to their people in discerning the will of God for the direction of the Church. They are called to consult with the laity – hear their voice – in what is called the "sensus fidelium," that is, the sense of the faithful.

The ministry of the Church belongs to all its members. The ordained members are to serve the laity by teaching them, supporting them in their daily lives of faith, and praying for them. Saint Augustine understood this servant role as the Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa in the fourth century. On the anniversary of his consecration as bishop, he preached these words to his people: "Where I'm terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation."

Q. Who are the ordained ministers of the Church?

A. The ordained ministers of the Church, deacons, priests, and bishops.

Q. What is the ministry of a deacon?

A. The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

Q. What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter?

A. The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.

Q. What is the ministry of a bishop?

A. As a successor to the first Apostles of Jesus Christ, the ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

Q. Are lay persons ministers?

A. All persons became ministers at the time of their baptism.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to Him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Q. What is the ministry of vowed religious?

A. Some Christians, both lay and ordained, are called to deepen their baptismal vows by taking additional vows and living religious lives of prayer, ministry, and witness to Christ.

Q. What is the duty of all Christians?

A. The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to pray daily; to diligently read and study the Holy Scriptures; to be aware of and familiar with the history, theology, liturgy and customs of the church; to fast when appropriate; to seek forgiveness of sins; to support the church financially to the best of one's ability; to come together weekly for corporate worship to receive Holy Communion; and to work and pray for the spread of the Kingdom of God.

13. Prayer and Worship

Personal prayer extends the prayer of the Church, the Body of Christ, into each Christian's life. At the Eucharist, we share the Body and Blood of Christ, and are in "holy communion" with the Lord – one with God in Christ. At the end of the Mass we are to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord". This includes prayer and the service of the needs of others. Prayer is the remembrance of who we are in Christ, and the deep listening at the center of that identity,

Early anonymous Christian writings on prayer and the spiritual life include:

- *Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (6th century) on the silence of God.*
- *The Cloud of Unknowing (14th century), on the stilling of the mind.*

Also, for centuries, great saints have written about prayer, such as:

- *Saint Maximus (6th century, now Turkey): "Those who seek the Lord should not look for Him outside themselves; on the contrary, they must seek Him within themselves through faith shown in action."*
- *Meister Eckhart (14th century, Germany): "The most powerful prayer...and the worthiest work of all is the outcome of a quiet mind."*
- *Saint John of the Cross (16th century, Spain): "Strive to preserve your heart in peace; let no event of this world disturb it."*
- *Saint Teresa of Avila (16th century, Spain): "Prayer is an act of love. Words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love."*

Prayer may begin with reading the scripture, saying the rosary, personal words, or meditating on a picture of Christ or the saints. The deepest prayer moves to silence. Sometimes we simply sit in silence. The Jesus Prayer is an ancient practice that has been popular in the Eastern Orthodox Church since early Christianity. It is simply repeating the name of Jesus, or a simple prayer, like: "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me."

Christian prayer parallels forms of meditation and prayer in other religions. But Christian prayer identifies us with Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he responded with the "Our Father," and added this lesson: "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:6) Also, Saint Paul wrote these words: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words." Prayer joins us to The Spirit, who has already begun the prayer in us.

Q. What is prayer?

A. Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.

Q. What is Christian Prayer?

A. Christian prayer is response to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Q. What prayer did Christ teach us?

A. Our Lord gave us the example of prayer known as the Lord's Prayer, also known as the "Our Father."

Q. What are the principal kinds of prayer?

A. The principal kinds of prayer are adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, meditation, oblation, intercession, petition, and blessing.

Q. What is adoration?

A. Adoration is the lifting up of the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence.

Q. What is praise?

A. Praise is the proclamation of God's glory, wonder, strength, and love, done out of love for and faith in God.

Q. Why do we praise God?

A. We praise God, not to obtain anything, but because God's Being draws praise from us.

Q. For what do we offer thanksgiving?

A. Thanksgiving is offered to God for all the blessings of this life, for our redemption, and for whatever draws us closer to God.

Q. What is penitence?

A. In penitence, we confess our sins and make restitution where possible, with the intention to amend our lives.

Q. What is meditation?

A. Meditation is the quiet opening of one's heart to God, the movement from words to stillness, without images or thoughts, the simple presence of a living and breathing person at one with the God who is all in all.

Q. What is prayer of oblation?

A. Oblation is an offering of ourselves, our lives and labors, in union with Christ, for the purposes of God.

Q. What is intercession?

A. Intercession brings before God the needs of others.

Q. What is petition?

A. Petition is presenting our own needs, that God's will may be done.

Q. What is a prayer of blessing?

A. A prayer of blessing asks God to set apart as sanctified ourselves, other persons, and those parts of God's creation with which we interact.

Q. What is corporate worship?

A. In corporate worship, we unite ourselves with others to acknowledge the holiness of God, to hear God's Word, to offer prayer, and to celebrate the sacraments.

Q. Why do we ask the Angels and Saints to pray for us?

A. We ask the Angels and Saints to pray for us because they are our friends, sisters, and brothers in the immediate presence of God in Heaven.

Q. What is the principal act of Christian worship on Sunday?

A. The Holy Eucharist, commonly known as the Mass, the source and summit of the life of the Church.

Q. What are the other common forms of public worship?

A. The Daily Offices, Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline and Stations of the Cross.

Q. What are the common forms of personal devotion?

A. The Our Father, the Doxology, the Hail Mary, the Memorare, the Regina Coeli, the Angelus, the Holy Rosary, and Hail, Holy Queen.

14. The Sacraments

If we take the classic definition that a sacrament is an outward sign of grace, given by Christ, then we can understand that the Church itself is a sacrament. As the People of God, and as baptized Christians, we are a sign of God's love, and a means of giving God's grace to others.

But the traditional seven actions of the Church, which we call sacraments, are symbolic rites that actually bestow upon us the presence of God. In the sacraments, we are made one with Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, who guides us in our daily lives as Christians.

What we call "grace" is the indwelling of the Spirit. But there are also "actual graces," which are the guiding events and moments of God. In the sacraments, we experience indwelling grace – the presence of God – and the experience of actual grace. We are in the life of the Holy Trinity because we are made one with Jesus, the Son of God. Therefore, we have the dignity of being daughters and sons of God in Christ.

People sometimes ask if a sacrament is still valid if the priest or deacon is not holy enough. The sacraments do not depend upon the holiness of the priest or deacon. They are the actions of the Church, and the minister of the sacrament expresses the intention of the Church by the words and actions of the sacrament. This is technically called "ex opera operato," which means valid by the actions themselves, in conformity with the Church's intention. However, it is best to approach the sacraments with a sense of devotion rather than a legalistic sense of their validity. After all, the sacraments are about a living relationship with Christ and his people, the Church.

The sacraments tell us that God's grace is the central action of our faith. We are reminded of this by the words of the scripture: "If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." (1 John 3:20) The sacraments are the gift of God, given by Christ and his Church. They tell us the story of how we are made one with God – primarily through the work of the Spirit. We conform to that growth in holiness by detaching ourselves from greed, resentment, anger, etc. And God helps us even in that detachment.

Catholics live in a "sacramental atmosphere." This means that they see the grace of God in everyday events and actions. For this reason, Catholics use statues, pictures and other items as "sacramentals," to remind them of the presence of God in their lives.

Q. What are the sacraments?

A. The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.

Q. What is grace?

A. Grace is God's favor towards us, unearned and undeserved.

Q. How does God's grace act on us?

A. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills.

Q. How are the sacraments related to our Christian hope?

A. Sacraments sustain our present hope and anticipate its future fulfillment.

Q. What is required for a valid sacrament?

A. The validity of a Sacrament depends on the form and the matter of the Sacrament.

Q. What is the form of a sacrament?

A. The form of a sacrament is its operative words and associated ceremonial actions.

Q. What is the matter of a sacrament?

A. The matter of a sacrament is the operative material as handed down by scripture and tradition. An example is that the matter of the Eucharist is the bread and wine that we use at Mass for Holy Communion as the Body and Blood of Christ.

Q. How do the sacraments operate?

A. The sacraments operate objectively, by the doing of the act.

Q. How many sacraments are there?

A. There are traditionally seven sacraments of the Church.

Q. What are the seven sacraments?

A. The seven sacraments are Holy Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage (Holy Matrimony), Reconciliation of a Penitent, and Anointing of the Sick.

Q. What are the Sacraments of Initiation?

A. The Sacraments of Initiation are Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation.

Q. What are the Pastoral Sacraments?

A. The Pastoral Sacraments are Reconciliation of a Penitent and Anointing of the Sick.

Q. What are the Vocational Sacraments?

A. The Vocational Sacraments are Marriage and Holy Orders.

Q. Is God's grace and love limited to the seven sacraments?

A. God's grace and love come to us in many ways, knowing no boundaries, and is available to all persons in every place and at any time.

15. Holy Baptism

In the Gospel of Matthew we find a great commissioning of the disciples by the risen Lord Jesus:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority 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 lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

Thus, throughout 2000 years of the Christian Church, people enter the life of faith through baptism. In the early Church, the converts were mostly adults, but soon whole families were being baptized, including infants. In the original process of baptism, the adults went through a rigorous period of instruction called the catechumenate. It often took two years, and just as often the chief teacher of the catechumens was the bishop. Often, catechumens were dismissed after the reading of the scriptures, and only the baptized remained for the Eucharist, where they would recite the Lord's Prayer and receive Holy Communion.

In the Catholic tradition, there is still a catechumenate for adults. It is usually shorter, and the optimal time for their baptism is at the Easter Vigil – the night before Easter – as the Church celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. All Christians identify with baptism as the sacrament that brings us into a death of the old self and a new life in Christ.

In the early Church, baptism was followed by Chrismation (called Confirmation in the Catholic tradition), which is the sacramental anointing of the newly baptized with the Chrism oil that has been blessed by the bishop. Later, the numbers of people being baptized in outlying areas was so great that the Western Church followed a practice of delaying the Chrismation (Confirmation) until a later time when the bishop could arrive at more distant parishes. In the Eastern Church the practice is still to immediately follow baptism with Chrismation. Finally, the early Church also added the immediate reception of Holy Communion (Eucharist) to the rituals of the newly baptized. Therefore, these three sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion) are called the Sacraments of Initiation. In the Christian life, everything is related back to these Sacraments of Initiation, which establish our identity in Christ.

Q. What is Holy Baptism?

A. Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as children of God and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign in Baptism?

A. The outward and visible sign in Baptism is water, in which the person is baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace in Baptism?

A. The inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.

Q. What is required of us at Baptism?

A. It is required that we renounce Satan and the power evil, repent of our sins, accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and solemnly commit to the Baptismal Covenant.

Q. What is the Baptismal Covenant?

A. The Baptismal Covenant is our indelible and irrevocable promise to God whereby we affirm our faith as stated in the Apostle's Creed; that we will continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers; that we will persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord; that we will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; that we will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves; and that we will respect the dignity of all God's living creatures.

Q. Why are infants baptized?

A. Infants are baptized so that they can share citizenship in the Covenant, membership in Christ, and redemption by God.

Q. How are the promises for infants made and carried out?

A. Promises are made for them by their parents and sponsors, who guarantee that the infants will be brought up within the Church, to know Christ and be able to follow Him.

16. The Holy Eucharist

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all have accounts of the Last Supper in which Jesus gave his disciples the gift of his Body and Blood through the ritual of consecrating bread and wine. Saint Paul also wrote of this ritual:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist includes the reading of scriptures, and particularly a reading from the gospels, followed by the prayers and rituals that end in sharing Holy Communion – the Body and Blood of Christ.

"Eucharist" means "thanksgiving," and the Eucharistic Prayer is a great prayer of thanksgiving for the offering of Jesus. He offered his life for us on the cross, and rose from the dead. We join with him in that offering when we are at Eucharist. We celebrate his life, death and resurrection, remembering his words on the night before he died, and asking the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. We join with the whole Church in this celebration because it is a sacrament that unites us with the whole Church as the Body of Christ.

Christ is present in the congregation, in the reading of the holy scriptures, in the ministers of the Eucharist, and especially recognized in "the breaking of the bread" – that is, the reception of Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ. That presence does not go away after the Eucharist, and so the remaining consecrated bread and wine are reserved in a special place, and often distributed to the sick, who could not be at the Eucharist. Saint Paul wrote: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

And Jesus tells us: "For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me." (John 6:55-57)

Q. What is the Holy Eucharist?

A. The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament celebrated in thanksgiving and for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again through the sharing of the Real Presence of His Body and Blood to nourish our souls and strengthen us to effectuate God's kingdom in our world.

Q. Why is the Eucharist called a sacrifice?

A. Because the Eucharist makes the sacrifice of Christ present, and unites us to His one offering of Himself.

Q. By what names is this service known?

A. The Holy Eucharist is called the Mass, deriving from the traditional dismissal, "Ite Missa Est", meaning, "Go, this is the sending out," emphasizing our obligation as Christians to carry out the Great Commission, while in the Eastern tradition, it is known as the Divine Liturgy.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign in the Eucharist?

A. The outward and visible sign in the Eucharist is bread and wine, given and received according to Christ's command.

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace given in the Eucharist?

A. The inward and spiritual grace in the Holy Communion is the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Christ given to his people.

Q. How do the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ?

A. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine retain the physical properties as such, but change in substance to become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Q. What do we mean by the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

A. Jesus Christ is fully and objectively present in the form of Bread and Wine, and in Holy Communion, we receive the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Christ.

Q. What is the meaning of receiving Holy Communion?

A. Those who receive are uniting themselves with Jesus Christ and following his life and teachings.

Q. What are the benefits which we receive in the Lord's Supper?

A. The benefits we receive are the strengthening of our union with Christ and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is our nourishment in eternal life.

Q. What is required of us when we come to the Eucharist?

A. It is required that we should examine our lives, repent of our sins, and be in love and charity with all people.

A Prayer Before Communion

Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father, and the work of the Holy Spirit, your death brought life to the world. By your holy Body and Blood free me from all my sins and from every evil. Keep me faithful to your teachings; and never let me be parted from you. Amen.

17. Confirmation

Confirmation has had many changes in its history. It was originally celebrated with Baptism, especially when the great numbers of those baptized were adults. Over the centuries, in Western Christianity, it was celebrated later when the bishop would visit outlying communities to confirm those who had been baptized much earlier.

Confirmation is understood as a strengthening in the Holy Spirit. In the recent history of Catholic tradition, it was often seen as the sacrament of Christian maturity, when older youth were confirmed. This difference of opinion about the appropriate timing of Confirmation is not fully resolved in Western Christianity, and especially in the Catholic world.

Confirmation is an anointing with Holy Chrism with the laying-on-of-hands. For this reason it is called Chrismation in the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions. The person being confirmed/chrismed is anointed with the same oil, blessed by the bishop, that is used for the consecration of a bishop, and to anoint the hands of a priest at ordination. That oil is a symbol of Christ because the very name "Christ" means "anointed."

The Chrism oil is also a symbol of the power of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and for the rites of ordaining a priest and consecration of a bishop (Holy Orders).

At the celebration of Holy Orders, the ancient hymn to the Holy Spirit is often chanted or sung ("Veni Sancte Spiritus") amplifying the meaning of the ritual as a calling and overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

If we reflect upon the Holy Spirit's role in the Church, we can find more meaning for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Spirit guides and inspires the Church and its members. The Spirit provides gifts of wisdom and leadership, as well as the development of holiness. We grow in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul wrote these words concerning the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit, we can understand the meaning of our Christian faith, and the meaning of our lives:

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." (1 Corinthians 2:12)

Q. What is Confirmation?

A. Although one becomes a full member of the Church at Baptism, Confirmation is the sacrament in which we express a mature commitment to Christ, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign of confirmation?

A. The outward and visible sign of confirmation is the laying-on-of hands and anointing with chrism by a bishop.

Q. What is required of those to be confirmed?

A. Those to be confirmed are required to have been baptized, are sufficiently instructed in and have a mature understanding of the Christian Faith, are penitent for their sins, accept Jesus as personal savior, and are ready, willing and able to accept adult Christian responsibilities as set out in the Baptismal Covenant.

18. Ordination (Holy Orders)

All Christians are called to bring the love of Christ into the world. Yet, some in the Church are "set apart" for ordained ministry to minister to the Church itself. Saint Paul described these as gifts, given by Christ for the unity and maturation of the Church:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4: 11-13)

Bishops are the successors of the apostles of Jesus. They are consecrated by the laying on of hands and anointing their heads with oil. They ordain deacons, by the laying on of hands, to be their presence in the community of faith, and especially to carry on the ministry of outreach to those who are marginalized or in special need. The bishop ordains the priests by the laying on of hands, and anointing their hands with oil. Priests are to form the Eucharistic community to extend the bishop's ministry of unity. By celebrating the Eucharist they strengthen the identity of the Church as the Body of Christ – unity and peace in Christ.

Ordination requires education, development in the spiritual life, and the call of the People of God for special service as an ordained minister of the Church. It is "pastoral," which means that those who are ordained must develop skills to guide the members of the Church in their Christian lives. This requires wise judgment, knowledge, patience, commitment and a dedication to one's own growth in holiness – following the Spirit in the love of Christ. Those ordained are "icons of Christ" for the Church. Those who see them should be reminded of Christ. Yet they have differences of personality and style. This is the beauty of diversity in the Body of Christ.

A principle given in the third chapter of 1 Timothy is that bishops are to have the ability to bring order and harmony to their own households as a sign that they can be given the authority of leading the Church, the household of God. This is a good principle for the other holy orders as well. Personal maturity is a functional requirement for healthy pastoral work. Yet those who are ordained also require the support of their people because they are fallible human beings. Saint Paul affirms this with these words: "We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7)

Q. What is Ordination?

A. Ordination is the Sacrament in which God gives authority and the grace of the Holy Spirit to those being made deacons, priests, and bishops, through prayer and the laying on of hands by bishops.

Q. What is required to be made a Deacon?

A. Candidates for ordination to the Diaconate must be at least eighteen years of age, of good moral character, sufficiently knowledgeable in scripture, theology, and the duties of a Deacon, and be called to serve or plant a particular community.

Q. What is required to be ordained a Priest?

A. To be a Priest, one must first be ordained a Deacon and at least twenty-four years of age; in addition to the studies required for the Diaconate, must be sufficiently knowledgeable in church history, ethics, liturgy and music, pastoral care, and the relationship of the Christian Faith to the contemporary world; and be called to serve or plant a particular community.

Q. What is required to be consecrated a Bishop?

A. To be a Bishop, one must be a Priest, at least thirty years of age, called by the community to be served, and possess the learning and leadership skills necessary to the Episcopate.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign in Ordination?

A. The outward and visible sign in Ordination is the vows made by the ordinand and the laying-on-of-hands by a bishop herself or himself ordained in the Apostolic Succession.

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace in Ordination?

A. The inward and spiritual grace of Ordination is the permanent, indelible change by the action of the Holy Spirit to actuate the ministry to which the ordinand is called.

Q. What is the Apostolic Succession?

A. The Apostolic Succession is the ministry of the twelve apostles called by Jesus Christ perpetuated by the serial laying on of hands by bishops on bishops from generation to generation.

19. Marriage (Holy Matrimony)

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony or Marriage in the Church has a long history. While it was recognized as a sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church, it was not declared as such until the 16th century. Additionally, while the Roman Catholic Church does not allow divorce and remarriage in the Church, the Eastern Orthodox, Old Catholic and Anglican Churches do allow divorce, and the recognition of another non-sacramental marriage. The Roman Catholic Church has a system of declaring marriages invalid through the annulment process.

Marriage is the recognition of a couple's union on many levels. It is a permanent sexual union, and a union that creates a family with financial and emotional bonds. Children born into the family are nurtured by the love and fidelity that their parents show to them, and to one another. In other words, the devotion and harmony of the family remind us of the family of Jesus. And Christ blesses the family through their love for one another – Christ is present where there is love. Modernly, marriage is now available to same-sex couples in many countries.

Like the calling of all sacraments, marriage requires great effort. It is a school for learning how to love – how to give of oneself. Marriage can be like sandpaper that smooths the edges of a fine wooden sculpture. The selfish urges are reduced, and the result is the beauty of devotion – spouses devoted to one another's welfare and support, and children learning from the atmosphere of devotion in which they live. This requires patient growth in the virtues of marriage.

The most popular scripture reading for Christian marriages is taken from Saint Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians. It describes the virtues needed for Christian Marriage – the way love functions:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7)

The goal of each spouse could be to replace the word "love" in this passage with his or her own name, and to measure themselves by reading the passage again. While we fall short of the goal, we remember that, as Christians, we rely on the grace of Christ to move us to the fulfillment of this goal. And wise spouses learn to forgive, so that the couple can let go of anger and renew their lives together, just as on the day they were married.

Q. What is Holy Matrimony?

A. Holy Matrimony is Christian marriage, in which two persons enter into a faithful sacramental union parted only by death with the presence of Christ as the bond of their relationship.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign of Holy Matrimony?

A. The outward and visible sign of Holy Matrimony is the giving and receiving of rings and vows in the presence of an ordained minister who imparts the blessing of the Church on their relationship.

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace of Holy Matrimony?

A. The inward and spiritual grace of Holy Matrimony is the commitment to love, honor and cherish each other in fidelity and permanency.

Q. What is the purpose of Holy Matrimony?

A. The purpose of Holy Matrimony is mutual love and companionship and parenting of children if the partners are called to, and freely choose, that ministry.

20. Reconciliation

The Letter to the Ephesians teaches that "Everything that is brought into the light becomes clear, and what is clear becomes light itself." (Ephesians 5: 13-14) this is a key to the meaning of confession of our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The sacrament can be celebrated as "general absolution," when it is celebrated in a group, without individual confession. However the regular way of celebrating the sacrament is with individual confession. When a penitent confesses to a priest, the sins that are confessed are held in confidence – the priest is not allowed to reveal them.

The word "sin" is not popular. Some people think that it is old-fashioned or that it produces too much guilt. What it means is simply that we make mistakes in judgment. We are sometimes rash, or we allow fear, anger and resentment to control our thoughts and behavior. Then we lash out at others by unkind words or by actions that betray our fidelity to the ones we love. This is contrary to the way of Christ.

The important thing to remember about our sins is that we are not to focus on them. It is better to focus on virtue than simply avoiding sin because we move toward the very things that we focus upon. We focus upon Jesus so that we can become his presence in the world. Because we are one with Christ the Lord, we become like him – shining his divine light into our lives and the lives around us. In 2 Peter we given excellent advice regarding the outcome of our focus on what is good within us, hoping to make it grow:

"For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble." (2 Peter 1: 5-10)

This passage makes it clear that our sin are a distraction, and a waste of our energy, that leads us away from our goal to be Christ in the world. This is very different from simply trying to follow rules. It is centered on the the Gospel (the "Good News") of Christ bringing us freedom by sharing his love, and sending us to share it as well.

Q. What is Reconciliation of a Penitent?

A. Reconciliation of a Penitent is the sacrament for an examination of one's conscience, taking responsibility for one's failings, receiving God's forgiveness, and reformation of one's life to reconcile oneself to God.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign in Reconciliation of a Penitent?

A. The outward and visible sign in Reconciliation of a Penitent is the confession of one's sins to a priest and receiving absolution.

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace in Reconciliation of a Penitent?

A. The inward and spiritual grace in Reconciliation of a Penitent is a change in heart towards God and one's neighbor.

Q. What is the "seal of the confessional"?

A. All confessions are absolutely confidential and cannot be revealed to anyone for any purpose no matter what the circumstances.

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours." ~ Saint Teresa of Avila

21. Holy Unction (Holy Anointing)

"Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." (James 5: 13-16)

These verses are a great witness to the beginnings of anointing in the Christian tradition. The passage tells us that anointing the sick will bring healing of body and will bring the forgiveness of sins. Thus, it healing at different levels. Yet, this anointing was used only for those near death for many centuries, and was called "Extreme Unction" – a final anointing, or anointing in extreme circumstances of nearness to death.

Holy Unction has been returned to use for the sick in general. It is not meant to replace medical care, and is not a guarantee of healing. Rather, like all prayer, it is meant as an initial healing at the core of the person being anointed. It is hoped that this spiritual healing will benefit the spirit, the mind and the body of that individual.

Saint Teresa wrote these words about illness: "Prayer is an act of love; words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love." Sometimes we are too sick to pray, to talk, or even to eat. Sickness can keep us from sleeping and we can be exhausted from not sleeping and resting. In these circumstances we need our family and friends to help us, to show us compassion and to simply be with us when we are discouraged. Illness is the great burden that brings us together. And yet, Jesus promises: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20) When two or three gather with a sick family member or friend, Jesus is with them. Sometimes we pray, and sometimes we simply love the sick person, and they love us. This too is a prayer because God is love, and love is sometimes simply sitting with God. This too is part of the ministry to the sick: anointing, prayer, service, conversation, and words of love.

Q. What is Holy Unction?

A. Unction is the sacrament for the spiritual healing of mind, body and soul.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign of Holy Unction?

A. The outward and visible sign of Unction is the anointing with oil and/or laying on of hands.

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace of Holy Unction?

A. The inward and spiritual grace of unction is God's grace is given for healing.

22. Other Rites and Ceremonies

The Catholic tradition includes many objects that are symbols of God known as "sacramentals." They can be simple or more developed aids in prayer. For example, icons are revered by the Eastern Church as windows into prayer – a glimpse for the body and mind into the presence of God. They are holy images that are not meant to look realistic, but rather are stylized and traditional with symbols of the love of God. They are pictures of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the saints and the events of the life of Christ and the Church. Icons are painted in a traditional process of fasting and prayer. They are meant to bring those who meditate upon them into the peace of God.

Other sacramentals are also meant to bring us to a place of stilling the mind, and opening the heart to God. They include pictures, statues, rosaries, etc., and are often use in conjunction with special prayers (like the prayers of the rosary). The cross and crucifix are especially revered because they remind us of the sacrifice of Christ for our sake – for the life of the world. Catholics ask for such items to be blessed with holy water as a symbol that they are special – set aside for their time of prayer.

Many homes have a special place for their holy pictures, candles, and other holy objects. This becomes an area for prayer and meditation – an area that reminds us of the presence of God in our homes and in our lives.

Q. What are sacramentals?

A. Sacramentals are material objects, things or actions, such as rosaries, icons, statues, holy water, palms, ashes, crucifixes, scapulars, and medals, set apart or blessed to manifest the respect due to the Sacraments, and so to excite good thoughts and to increase devotion.

Q. Is God's activity limited to liturgies?

A. Liturgies are patterns of countless ways by which God uses material things to reach out to us and do no limit God's activity in the universe.

23. Christian Living

There are many approaches to faith. Some are rigid and legalistic. Some are so hazy and confusing. Christian faith comes through a long tradition of conflict. The result is the various names given to the different groups of Christians: Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, liberal, conservative, fundamentalist, literalist, traditionalist, and others.

Christian faith is the effort to live in imitation of Jesus Christ. His compelling story of ministry, death and resurrection form the impetus for Christian practice and history. His life and image unite all Christians, despite their divisions and disagreements.

Christianity has been long plagued efforts to align its message with political or economic power. Yet, this is contrary to the core of Jesus' ministry and message: "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36) What is this freedom? It is placing all personal agenda at the service of the Gospel of Christ – expressed by Jesus in the Gospel of John: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)

Christians may suffer economic setback, ridicule, prejudice or rejection by family and friends when they stand for justice, harmony, and diversity of culture, ethnicity, etc. We look at the history of the Church and racial prejudice, or the struggle within the Church to understand the issues of LGBT people. The work of interpreting the Gospel has brought division even to the household of faith (the Church). We remember that Jesus said:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household." (Matthew 10:34-36)

Yet again, the Christian must not define the struggle as "us against them." We remember: "Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) The Nicene Creed reminds us that we remain constant in the belief that reality is both what is seen and unseen. We embrace what we know in our hearts: the love and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. How does one live as a Christian?

A. One lives as a Christian when the love of Christ penetrates one's life as shown by utilizing the fullest potential with which God has endowed us.

Q. What is the guiding principle of all Christian living?

A. The guiding principle of all Christian living is that all human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is fundamental to society.

Q. What is the role of faith in Christian living?

A. Faith leads to trust and confidence that God will always love humanity unconditionally.

Q. What is the role of love in Christian living?

A. Love is the foundation of everything in our relationships with ourselves, with others, and with God.

Q. How does the love of Christ penetrate our lives?

A. The love of Christ penetrates our lives when we imitate Jesus by showing compassion for others; by forgiving others for the wrongs that they have done to us; by relieving the sufferings of others; and by resolving conflicts with other persons without violence or oppression.

Q. How do we utilize the fullest potential with which God has endowed us?

A. We utilize the fullest potential with which God has endowed us by honestly assessing and developing to the maximum our talents to the best of our abilities; by utilizing our resources to further God's Kingdom; and by developing relationships with others characterized by love and respect.

Q. How do communities practice Christian living?

A. Communities practice Christian living when they place compassion above law; when they respect the rights to freedom and dignity of all persons; when they distribute resources so that none may be in want of the necessities of life; and when they protect their most vulnerable members.

Q. What is the role of forgiveness in Christian living?

A. Forgiveness, the manifestation of mercy towards one who has offended us, is a necessity, not an option, for Christians, as it is commanded by Christ Himself, for as we forgive others, God forgives us.

Q. What is the role of repentance in Christian living?

A. Repentance, the turning of one's life away from sin and towards God, sets our lives on the paths that lead towards perfecting our relationships with God and others.

Q. What is the role of reconciliation in Christian living?

A. Reconciliation is the restoration of a right relationship between ourselves and God and ourselves and others.

Q. What is mercy?

A. Mercy is compassion, forgiveness, and forbearance.

Q. What is the role of mercy in Christian living?

A. Mercy impels us to develop a deep awareness of the suffering of others leading to a desire to help, leading us to pardon offenses against us, and displaying patience when faced with provocation.

Q. What are the corporal works of mercy?

A. The corporal works of mercy are feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, giving drink to the thirsty, visit the sick, visit prisoners, giving alms to the poor, burying the dead, all of which model how we should treat others as if they were Christ.

Q. What are the Seven Virtues?

A. The Seven Virtues are Faith, Hope, Love, known as the three theological virtues, and Prudence, Temperance, Courage and Justice, known as the four cardinal virtues.

Q. What is Faith?

A. Faith is trust and loyalty based on things seen and not seen.

Q. What is Hope?

A. Hope is the expectation of a good future based on God's promises of redemption through Jesus.

Q. What is Love?

A. Love is the mutual and unconditional intimacy that characterizes the essence of God's relationship to humankind.

Q. What is Prudence?

A. Prudence is making appropriate choices.

Q. What is Temperance?

A. Temperance is self-control over those parts of human nature, which, if unrestrained, lead to corruption and destruction.

Q. What is Courage?

A. Courage is going forward in spite of difficulties to reach a chosen and worthy object.

Q. What is Justice?

A. Justice is the reordering of relationships towards full reconciliation between God and humankind and between persons, and the distribution of material things in a manner recognizing human needs.

Q. What is the role of sexuality on Christian living?

A. God intended sexuality as the free expression of love between consenting adult persons in a committed intimate relationship with appropriate measures to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancy.

24. The Christian Hope

"We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5: 3-5)

In this passage we learn that hope is cultivated through persistent endurance in the face of suffering. Hope is not something that can simply be created by gritting our teeth and making it happen. It is a process that begins when we face difficulties that seem troubling, and that have no easy solution. Hope is developed by maintaining trust in the face of adversity. This becomes evident when we review the lives of great saints who turn to God as their only resource when other options were closed. They found their trust to be well placed, and their hope increased.

The great religions of the world all agree on the reality that life involves suffering. The question arises for every faith, "What do we do in the face of suffering – which seems to accompany every life to some extent. The Christian answer is the cross: to transform the suffering into a force for freedom and peace. Saint Paul reminds us:

"I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:24-27)

As Christians, we seek the secret hidden in suffering. Behind the seeming futility of life lies the mystery that unites all in the great hope of Christ – the reality revealed to those who trust in Jesus and his Gospel. Christians, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta, or Martin Luther King Jr., have courageously spent their lives for others – in compassion and the quest for justice. They put their energy into these missions, and not personal gain, because they hoped for a future that would be better, and believed that they would come to that place of the kingdom beyond rich and poor, right and wrong, conflict and peace. This is the place of the resurrected Christ, who has overcome all sin and death – the one who lives in us.

Q. What is the role of hope for Christians?

A. Hope gives us purpose in living as Christians.

Q. What is the Christian hope?

A. The Christian hope is to become like God and become one with God by living with confidence in newness and fullness of life, awaiting the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God's purpose for the world by the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Q. What does it mean to become like God and become one with God?

A. To become like God is to acquire God's traits of love, compassion and justice so that we may participate in God's divinity.

Q. What do we mean by the coming of Christ in glory?

A. By the coming of Christ in glory, we mean that Christ will come, not in weakness but in power, and will make all things new.

Q. What are the characteristics of the Kingdom of God?

A. The Kingdom of God will bring a universe of compassion, peace, and justice.

Q. What is compassion as found in the Kingdom of God?

A. Compassion is the relief of all suffering as the highest objective of all divine and human activity.

Q. What is peace as found in God's Kingdom?

A. Peace is a positive and tranquil state of individual and communal life in the presence and power of God brought about by resolving conflicts without resort to evil means.

Q. What is the role of justice in the Kingdom of God?

A. God desires that relationships among persons be based on love for one's neighbor with a preference to the most vulnerable.

Q. What do we mean by heaven and hell?

A. By heaven, we mean eternal life in our enjoyment of God; by hell, we mean eternal death in our rejection of God.

Q. What do we mean by purgatory?

A. By purgatory, we mean our growth in grace as we are purified from sin in preparation for the beatific vision of God in eternal life.

Q. Why do we pray for the dead?

A. Believing that life does not end with death, we pray for the departed because we still hold them in our love, and because we trust that in God's presence those who have chosen to serve God will grow in God's love, until they see God as God is.

Q. What do we mean when we say Christ will come again?

A. We believe that Christ will come in glory when the Kingdom of God becomes a reality for all persons.

Q. What do we mean by the resurrection of the body?

A. We mean that God will raise us from death in the fullness of our being, that we may live with Christ in the communion of the saints.

Q. What is the communion of saints?

A. The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.

Q. What do we mean by everlasting life?

A. By everlasting life, we mean a new existence, in which we are united with all the people of God, in the joy of fully knowing and loving God and each other.

Q. What, then, is our assurance as Christians?

A. Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

PRAYERS FOR ALL

Doxology

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, AMEN.

Pater Noster

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be 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.

Ave Maria

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with Thee. Blessed art thou among 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.

Salve Regina

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To you we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, O 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. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. AMEN.

Ave Regina Caelorum

Queen of the heavens, we hail thee, Hail thee, Lady of all the Angels; Thou the dawn, the door of morning Whence the world's true light is risen: Joy to thee, O Virgin glorious, Beautiful beyond all other; Hail, and farewell, O most gracious, Intercede for us always to Jesus. Vouchsafe that I may praise thee, O holy Virgin. Give me strength against thine enemies. AMEN.