

# Describing the Catholic Faith

## **Creed**

What we believe to be Divinely revealed as beautiful, true and good about God and His plan of salvation. The doctrine we pass on is rooted in Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture.

## **Worship/ Sacraments**

How we celebrate what we believe, centered on the Holy Eucharist received at Holy Mass. Liturgy expresses the mystery of faith in our worship of God and our reception of the graces He bestows through the Sacraments.

Faith is centered on the person of  
**Jesus Christ**



## **Morality**

How we apply and live what we believe. The concrete ways in which we live out our Baptismal promises to be conformed to Christ as members of His Body.

The Magisterium's interpretation and application of the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes and other commands found in Sacred Scripture.

## **Prayer**

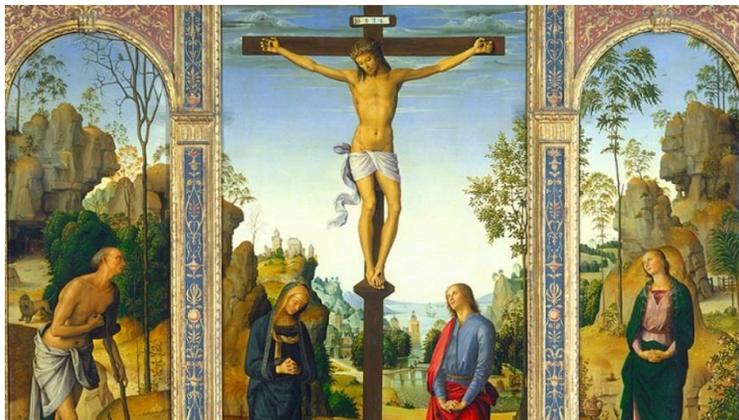
How we encounter the object of our belief as individuals and as members of the Body of Christ. Christian prayer is founded on the prayer Our Lord taught us and on the attitude of the Son to the Father: Thy will be done.

# The Catholic Faith

## *Overview of Key Topics and Terms*

### Creed: Our Doctrine, what we profess

- God reveals Himself to us, His creatures, through Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Tradition. God made human beings in His image and likeness, yet we are free to choose to disobey and to sin (to do what is wrong or to avoid doing what is right)
- We believe in **One God**—who is the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, took on human flesh and became man (the Incarnation). Through His sacrificial death on a cross and His glorious Resurrection from the dead, He redeemed us from the effects of sin—spiritual death—and offers us the gift of salvation through faith in Him.
- We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, founded by Christ on the Apostles under the leadership of Peter. The Church is led today by the successors of the Apostles (Pope and Bishops)
- We believe in the communion of saints—that those who reside in heaven, in purgatory and on earth are united in the one Mystical Body of Christ (the Church). We profess our faith in the saints' ability to intercede for us. We honor Mary as the Queen of Heaven, the first and greatest of the saints.
- We profess our faith in Christ's return and in the resurrection of the body at the final judgment. We place our hope in everlasting life and in the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven-inaugurated with Jesus Christ and fulfilled at His Second Coming.



## Liturgy and Sacraments: how we celebrate

- **Liturgy** is the great work of the Church—our obligation and privilege to give God thanks and praise in public worship for His works of creation, redemption and salvation.
- We celebrate by gathering together to pray and to receive the **Sacraments**. The Sacraments are the master-works of God—where we receive the presence of Christ and the gift of God’s grace. God designed the Sacraments to use physical signs to point us to His deeper, mysterious reality. They truly bring about what they signify (they are **efficacious**) because of the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We believe there are **7 Sacraments** given (instituted) by Christ to the Church: three Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), two Sacraments of Healing (Penance and Anointing of the Sick), and two Sacraments of Vocation (Holy Orders and Matrimony).
- The **Eucharist** is the source and summit of the Christian faith. We have an obligation and privilege to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, and to receive the Eucharist if we are properly disposed (free of mortal sin, observed communion fast, have right disposition). When we receive Holy Communion, we receive the Body and Blood, soul and divinity, the Living Presence of the risen Jesus Christ.
- **Bishops, Priests and Deacons**, through the Sacrament of **Holy Orders**, receive a special **vocation** to serve and govern the People of God. In a line that reaches back to Peter and the Apostles (**apostolic succession**), these men are ordained to serve as shepherds of the Church, visible representatives of Christ and guardians of the teachings of Christ passed on through the apostles (**apostolic tradition**). A priest, when celebrating the Sacraments, is acting in the **person of Christ**—He is a sacramental sign of Christ’s love, mercy, and power. The priest is an instrument of God’s grace—not its author or director.
- The **Sacrament of Matrimony** joins one woman and one man in a lifelong **covenant** which is a symbol of Christ’s love for His bride, the Church. Spouses are called to serve each other in love, helping each other become saints. Husbands and wives are called to be open to having children, and to live as a “domestic church” where God is proclaimed to the world.



## **Morality and Discipleship: how we live**

- We are called to live holy lives, in conformity to Christ. We do not see our **good works** as earning us salvation, but as being a necessary and integral part of a **living and expressed faith**. One cannot assent to believe in Jesus Christ without following His commands and example.
- The Church, as our Mother and teacher, instructs us in the moral life. She has authority because the Holy Spirit dwells in and guides the Church. The Pope and the Apostolic Councils, through the power of the Holy Spirit, cannot err in matters of doctrine (**Infallibility**).
- The **Ten Commandments**, the **Beatitudes**, and the letters of the New Testament contain God's commands for the moral life. We are charged to apply these rules to our daily life and to obey them. Obedience to God's will is one of the most important struggles in our effort to be Christian disciples. Of first priority, however, is the active development and growth of our **love for God and for our neighbor**. All morality begins with, resides in, and ends at love.
- As believers in Jesus Christ, **we cannot separate our faith from the rest of our lives**. Christ's moral teachings (through His words, in the New Testament letters, in the teaching of the Church) are meant to impact how we live in the world—our politics, our livelihood, our families, our community. We are charged with **building God's kingdom on earth**—by living as holy witnesses of Christ, by serving others with Christ-like love, and by seeking ways to bring the Good News to all people.

## **Prayer: how we develop and sustain a relationship with God**

- **Prayer** is the joy and the task of every Christian. It is **communication (dialogue)** with God—in our effort to know, love, and serve God and to prepare to receive His gift of eternal life. Prayer, like faith itself, is our response to God's invitation—it is God who initiates, we respond.
- **Private prayer** and **communal prayer** are closely connected and support each other—both reach their pinnacle through the prayer of Holy Mass. We are obligated to pray together because we are, in fact, one Body, united by the Holy Spirit.
- Private prayer has many **forms and expressions**—and it reflects a unique and personal relationship between God and each person. As with any intimate friendship, it takes time and effort to develop. The variety of spiritual disciplines in the Church can guide our spirituality.



- The **Lord's Prayer** (Our Father) is the prayer of the Church—the summary of the Gospel, the prayer which can direct our spiritual life. The seven petitions of the Lord's prayer teach us about what to ask for and how to ask for it.
- People in the Bible, the saints, and holy people in our day and age provide helpful **models** for our own life of prayer. A living and loving relationship with God takes effort, concentration, and persistence.

### **Practices and Devotions: distinctively "Catholic" behaviors**

- Catholics use private devotions as aids to prayer: **prayers of the Saints, the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Novenas and Litanies**, etc. These private devotions, when they aid one's worship, are truly helpful—but no one is required to adopt them. **Sacramentals** are physical symbols of Jesus or the Christian life such as statues, holy water, icons, a rosary or a crucifix. They are helpful aids to prayer, but they do not confer grace and have no power in and of themselves and we do not worship them. God invites us to use physical symbols as a means for deepening our attentiveness and reverence in prayer.
- Each Catholic belongs to a **parish**; each parish is part of a **diocese** (or **archdiocese**). Each diocese/archdiocese is led by a **bishop** (or **archbishop**) who is shepherd of the local church and a successor to the Apostles. All the dioceses are united together under the leadership of the **Pope**, the bishop of Rome and successor of Peter.
- All Catholics, by virtue of their baptism, are called to participate in the **evangelizing** (missionary), **catechizing** (instruction) and **charitable** (service) works of the Church. Catholics are expected to contribute to the life of their parish and to the wider church—through the **sacramental giving** of their time, treasure and talents (**stewardship**). Catholics are expected to raise their children in the faith—to participate in the Mass, to provide religious instruction for their children, and to guide their children to recognize their vocation in the world (whether to Matrimony, Holy Orders, religious life or the single life).



- Catholics mark time during the year through special seasons and feast days of the **Liturgical year**. The Liturgical year revolves around two great feasts: **Christmas** (the feast of the Incarnation) and **Easter** (the feast of the Resurrection). We spend time together celebrating and reflecting on the enormity of these mysteries at the center of Christian faith. We prepare for these great feasts by a period of preparation: **Advent** for Christmas and **Lent** for Easter. **Ordinary Time** rounds out the year as a time to grow in discipleship.
- Catholics are invited to take time for special opportunities to grow in their faith. Whether by making a **pilgrimage**, going on a **retreat**, attending a **parish mission** or other special event, Catholics are encouraged to continue their faith growth throughout their lives. Catholics are also encouraged to join together in groups to support the work and ministries of the church, such as the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Daughters of America, Altar Society Guilds, St. Vincent de Paul, and many others. Lay Catholics can also join religious communities as a “lay associate” and live according to the rule (guidelines) out in the world.



**“May the fire of God’s love descend to fill your hearts, unite you ever more fully to the Lord and His Church, and send you forth, a new generation of apostles, to bring the world to Christ!”**

*Pope Benedict XVI, 7/20/2008*

# Who are Catholics?

## *Central Elements of Catholic Identity*

**“How beautiful it is to be Christian. It is not a burden to be carried... it is like having wings.”**

Pope Benedict XVI, 8/17/2005

### ***Catholics are...***

People who are **optimistic** because we know God’s powerful hand is guiding our eternal destiny—and because the salvation He offers us is worth anything and everything we have in this world.

People who practice God’s **mercy** rather than enact God’s judgment or vengeance, even reconciling with repentant sinners no matter what the sin.

People who value **obedience** as a critical spiritual trait—fighting against the temptations of pride, ambition and divisiveness.

People who recognize our **interdependence** as members of one Body of Christ in our spiritual and physical life, rather than acting as independent or dependent people.

People who admire and cultivate **courage** when expressing our faith, rather than tentatively or fearfully ‘caving in’ to a hostile culture or person.

People who recognize the complexity of doctrine and its interpretation, knowing that understanding our faith often requires **“both-and”** thinking rather than the easier, but incomplete, “either-or” thinking.

People who see the content of our faith as a **treasure** we are called to preserve in its entirety, not as a set of propositions that we create or revise or select from.

People who reside within and express the **joy** of Christ, rooted in our gratitude for the unearned gifts of grace and in the firm hope that what God has promised, He will carry out.

People who seek to live within the **peace** of Christ, assenting to His will rather than in a state of anxiety or hand-wringing about how we want things to be or to turn out.

People who see themselves in a **holistic** way—as embodied souls, comprised of a hierarchy of soul, will, mind and body.

People who assent to God’s **absolute Truth** and morality, rejecting moral relativism and the ‘easy way out’ of rationalizing sins away.

People who freely choose to live within **covenants**—with God, with each other—that requires faithfulness, perseverance, and reconciliation.

People who accept and live within **mystery**—humbly accepting that we can't have all the answers and that we won't fully understand God's nature and plan.

People who accept God's Lordship and Providence—even when it involves **suffering** and the **cross**—and recognize that God allows what He doesn't desire for us in order to bring about a greater good.

People who honor and emulate God's **mediators** and instruments, especially our canonized saints and our ordained shepherds, the bishops, priests and deacons.

People who see **signs of God's hand** within time and space: in creation, in the events of our lives and in the grand events of history—especially as laid out in the Bible.

People who value **detachment** from this world—in the world but not of it—and seek to live in 'poverty of spirit.'

People who are moved to **acts of mercy and charity** for the good of our neighbor as a sign of our love for God—knowing that our generosity toward others can never match His toward us.

People who recognize and honor the **inestimable worth of every human being** as made in God's image and likeness—including the weak, vulnerable, forsaken, rejected and unlovable.

People who seek to live in the exhilarating **freedom** of Christ's love. We see the greatest exercise of freedom as choosing to do good—not as a license to act however we want.

People content to be **child-like** in their faith and trust in God, rather than embracing empty and superficial notions of worldly sophistication and maturity.

People who honor God and communicate about Him through the genius and creativity of **art and culture**—valuing musical, visual, literary and performing arts as ways to glorify God.

People who **live for Sundays**—who recognize as the source and center of our lives the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and in our participation in the Mass.

**Most important of all:**

We know that at the center of it all is the person of **Our Lord, Jesus Christ**, who loves us, draws us into intimate friendship, and becomes our true eternal destiny.

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*"Yes, dear friends, God loves us. This is the great truth of our life; it is what makes everything else meaningful—an intimate relationship with Christ."*

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Pope Benedict

