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To
Our
Roman
Catholic
Church



*A Quick and Simple Guide
to Basic Catholic Teachings and Rituals*

Introduction



Welcome to our Roman Catholic Church. This booklet was written as a short yet helpful guide to basic teachings and rituals of the Catholic Church. May it welcome and encourage you to join with us as we celebrate our Faith.

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Attending Mass



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The Mass truly celebrates, teaches, nourishes and strengthens every aspect of our Faith in one gathering. It is the Sacrifice of the Cross made present to us. At Mass, we gather together in the presence of God not only to give praise and thanks to Him, but to pray for one another. We learn from and are inspired by His word in Scripture, and when we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, our faith and unity in Him and each other are nourished and strengthened (refer to page 9 for information regarding Holy Communion). By actively and devoutly participating within the Mass, our Faith is refreshed and renewed, making us more fully prepared and willing to go forth and live as the People of God.

Attending Mass each and every Sunday in particular, is necessary in keeping with the Commandments. Sunday is not like any other day of the week. It is the Christian Sabbath, the one day each week set aside and blessed by God to be kept holy. If we want to live His commandments, love God with all our heart and love others as He loves us, then why wouldn't we attend Mass, where we gain the strength, courage and know-how to do so?

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Although attendance at daily Mass is possible for Catholics, the Church's precept (the minimal obligation for growing in love of God and neighbor) obliges all Catholics to attend Mass every Sunday and Holy day of obligation. Holy days of obligation are the principal feast days of the Church in each country.

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We prepare for Mass by dressing appropriately, aware that we are in a holy place and in His holy presence. Arriving before Mass begins, we take some time to pray so that our hearts, souls and minds can focus solely on the Lord and be ready to fully participate in the Mass with sincere and spiritually gainful thoughts, words, songs and physical gestures. We prepare for receiving Holy Communion during Mass as described on page 9.

"I, the Lord, am your God... You shall not have other gods besides me"

"Remember the Sabbath day – keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God..."

Exodus 20:2-3, 8-10

"... and (He) went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day..."

Luke 4:16

"They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles... to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers"

Acts 2:42

Making the Sign of the Cross



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Making the sign of the cross is a sacred action in which we bless ourselves or others. It is a reminder of the price Christ paid for us, our sins and our redemption, and it is an outward confirmation of our faith and belief in the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

This outward sign of tracing the cross of Jesus as we verbally profess our belief in the Holy Trinity physically reinforces our interior faith in the love God pours out to us through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. With this faith, we make the sign of the cross to ask for and receive God's favor, God's protection, God's blessing.

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The sign of the cross is made at the beginning and end of every Mass. We trace the sign of the cross on our foreheads, lips and hearts just before the Gospel reading. Priests bless us with the sign of the cross when we are gathered together on various occasions and for special purposes during the celebration of the seven Sacraments. We also make the sign of the cross as individuals before and after personal prayer, or as a prayer all by itself.

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A priest often blesses a group by tracing the sign of the cross with his right hand. We make the sign of the cross by reverently touching the forehead, then the chest, then the shoulders (left shoulder first) with our right forefingers, and then end by putting both hands together as in prayer. While we are making the sign of the cross, we recite the following words either out loud or internally: "In the name of the Father" as the forehead is being touched, "and of the Son" as the chest is being touched, "and of the Holy Spirit" as each shoulder is touched, and then "Amen" as our hands are clasped together.

This gesture is meant to be a real and unhurried sign.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life"

John 3:16

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always... I will not leave you orphans..."

John 14:16-18

Blessing Ourselves with Holy Water



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We bless ourselves with Holy Water in order to recall our Baptism and renew our Baptismal vows. When we were baptized, we or our Godparents, on our behalf, vowed that we would turn away from sin and forever and foremost belong to Christ and his body, the Church, and to bring our gifts and talents to serve humanity. We were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and were immersed in or had Holy Water poured on us to complete our Baptism. Every time we bless ourselves with Holy Water, we not only renew that Baptismal vow to live as one belonging to Christ and his body, the Church, but we receive God's grace to do so more faithfully.

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The main purpose of Holy Water is for blessing, but it is also sprinkled on the congregation by the priest during certain celebrations, and put into special containers for personal use by the faithful. Holy Water is also found in the Holy Water fonts at the church entrance, and we typically bless ourselves with this Holy Water as we enter and exit the church.

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Because Holy Water is holy, we gently and reverently dip our right fingertips into it and then use those same fingertips to make the sign of the cross. This is done while recalling our baptismal vows, the meaning behind the sign of the cross, and our commitment to Christ. Blessing ourselves with Holy Water is done in the same unhurried and meaningful manner as when we make the sign of the cross without Holy Water.

“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”

Matthew 28:19

Genuflecting



Genuflecting (or kneeling) is a humble, reverent gesture which we make to show our love for Jesus and our adoration of Him.

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Since we as Catholics believe the Holy Eucharist to be the Real Presence of Jesus under the appearance of what was once just normal bread, we genuflect whenever the Holy Eucharist is present inside the tabernacle or adored on the altar. The tabernacle is a special receptacle located on or near the altar which holds the Holy Eucharist. A lit candle next to it signifies the presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist inside the tabernacle. We genuflect out of respect, honor and reverence for Him and His presence there.

If we greet others with a handshake and bow or curtsey to royalty, then it is only fitting that we genuflect with the utmost reverence before the presence of Jesus, who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

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We typically genuflect upon our arrival (prior to sitting down in a pew), upon leaving (after exiting the pew), and any time we should pass before the candle-lit tabernacle.

At Mass, the priest and all other ministers assisting at the Mass genuflect when they approach and when they depart from the altar. During Mass, the priest genuflects after the showing of the Eucharist (Jesus' Body), after the showing of the chalice (containing the Precious Blood of Jesus), and before administering Holy Communion.

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Facing toward the presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist (inside the tabernacle or adored on the altar), a genuflection is made by reverently bending the right knee down to the ground. Some may add the gesture of making the sign of the cross before rising from this position. For those unable to genuflect, a profound bow is sufficient.

“...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth”

Philippians 2:10

Sitting, Standing and Kneeling



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During Mass, we sit, stand and kneel in order to physically reinforce our spiritual participation within the various parts of the Mass. These postures are not mere customs, but physical expressions of our love for God. When done properly, these physical gestures help us to better emphasize and acknowledge different elements within the Mass, His presence there, and our participation in this great Mystery. They absolutely and positively impact our personal, spiritual growth.

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Sitting is a typical posture for listening and so we sit for the pre-Gospel readings and homily.

Standing implies confidence, attentiveness, respect and honor. During Mass, we stand as we pray with confidence, as we listen attentively to the Gospel, and as we show respect for the celebrant when he enters and exits.

Kneeling signifies adoration. During Mass, we kneel throughout the entire Eucharistic Prayer and after receiving Holy Communion. Some may also kneel, outside of Mass, while in personal prayer in the church.

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The ways in which we sit, stand and kneel play an important role in our communication with the Lord, as we pray with our bodies. The effort we make in these postures can enhance our participation and deepen our devotion or weaken it. Therefore, when we sit, we sit up in a way that helps us truly listen. We stand with respect and honor, keeping both feet on the floor. We kneel in awe and adoration, placing both knees on the kneeler, back straight and hands folded in prayer. We do all of these in ways that allow us to be taught by God how to grasp and express the divine Mystery that we celebrate.

“And on entering the house they saw the child with Mary His mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage...”

Matthew 2:11

“... He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah...”

Luke 4:16-17

“After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, He prayed”

Luke 22:41

Going to Confession

(Sacrament of Reconciliation)



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We go to confession to be reconciled with God and the Church for the sins we have committed and to be spiritually strengthened by Him with the grace to overcome future temptations. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, our sins are openly admitted by us and graciously forgiven by God through the ministry of the bishops and priests. In order to repair the wounded relationship with God and the Church that we created by sinning, the Sacrament of Reconciliation also provides us with penance, or acts given by the bishop or priest to repair the damage we caused and re-establish good habits that are more in line with the love of God and His commandments. Then, with the bishop's or priest's absolution, we are strengthened by God. We go forth reconciled and at peace.

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Most parishes offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation at designated times on Saturdays and by appointment. How often we go normally depends upon the knowledge of the sin committed, the severity of it, and the desire to be reconciled. Although some Catholics are known to go to confession several times a month, the Church's precept (the minimal obligation) for confession is at least once per year, or immediately if one has committed a mortal sin. It is recommended to receive this Sacrament frequently to grow in God's grace.

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Before going to confession, we must first thoughtfully and prayerfully examine our conscience. That is, we must recall to the best of our ability, all our thoughts, all our words, all that we have done and all that we have failed to do since our last confession, that were not in keeping with the love of God and neighbor. Once we have done that and are truly sorry for our sins, we go to confession and then must resolve within ourselves not to sin again.

"...as the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

John 20: 21-23

"...God, who has ... given us the ministry of reconciliation ... entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ... We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

2 Corinthians 5: 18-20

"A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup."

1 Corinthians 11: 28

Receiving Holy Communion

(Sacrament of the Eucharist)



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At the Last Supper Jesus took bread and wine, said the blessing, and the bread and wine were transformed into His Body and His Blood. He then commanded His apostles to take them, to eat and drink them, and to continue doing the same in remembrance of the sacrifice He was making for all. From those very first apostles all the way down to today's bishops and priests, the Catholic Church continues to do this when it celebrates the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus. The bishop or priest says the words of institution, and then through the power of the Holy Spirit, bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus and shared among the faithful.

When we receive Holy Communion, we are sharing in the true Body and Blood of Jesus even though Holy Communion may look and still taste like normal bread and wine. Because it is truly Jesus we receive, we become one in Him and He in us. We are spiritually nourished by His Body, cleansed by His Blood, and united to Him and each other as the one Body of Christ. This strengthens us as individuals and as a community, and grants us the grace to more faithfully continue His sacrificial work of love and mercy... just as it did for the very first disciples when they ate the Bread and drank the cup.

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The Sacrament of the Eucharist is one of seven Sacraments instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church where, through the grace of God, we receive the strength and unity needed to fully live and grow in the Faith of the Catholic Church. Since these seven Sacraments strengthen and unite us to Christ and the Catholic Church, we must first consider and confirm our commitment to live and grow as one belonging to Christ and the Catholic Church before receiving them. Before receiving Holy Communion, we must first consider and confirm that we have been baptized, that we believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, that we are in a state of grace and not conscious of grave sin without prior sacramental confession, and then if physically able, that we have fasted one hour.

In order to fully live and grow in our Faith, Catholics should receive Holy Communion whenever we participate at Mass. At a minimum, we are to receive once per year, preferably during the Easter Season.

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The Eucharist may be received in the hand or on the tongue, and immediately before receiving both the Body and Blood of Christ, we make a physical sign of reverence (such as a simple bow or genuflection).

"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

John 6: 55-56

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

1 Corinthians 10: 16-17

Praying to Mary, the Angels and Saints



We believe that the Church in heaven and the Church on earth are united together. As we help one another on earth, those in heaven help us.

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Y** We pray to Mary the mother of Jesus, the angels and the saints (those who have reached heaven) in order to ask that they pray with us and for us to God, just as we would ask one another to pray with us and for us to God. We also sometimes pray in order to thank them for praying on our behalf, just as we would thank one another.

Mary, the angels and saints have set examples for us to follow and show us how to love and serve God. Just as we honor and respect modern day heroes and sometimes ask them for additional help because of their heroism, we likewise honor, respect and ask for help from Mary, the angels and the saints.

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N** Prayers can be offered at any time of the day or night. We should pray often and always, when we feel the need or desire to express praise, adoration, thanksgiving or a request for help.

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W** There are many, many different types and forms of prayer. For instance, we can pray alone, with others, on bended knee or not. We can use our own words, no words, or recite prayers written by others to help us. There are prayers written specifically for the help and intercession of particular saints and angels, but the one common element in any prayer is that it is directed toward God, with a humble and sincere heart.

"...Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones."

Revelation 5:8

"The smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God from the hand of the angel."

Revelation 8:4

Internet Sites and References



Internet Sites

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“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...”

Matthew 16:18

