



A Follower of Jesus In His Holy Catholic Church



ARCHDIOCESE
of DUBUQUE

**A Follower of Jesus
In His Holy Catholic Church**



A collaborative effort
of followers of Jesus
members of His holy Catholic Church
in the Archdiocese of Dubuque

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INTRODUCTION

This telling of our holy Catholic Faith is offered to anyone, everyone who is looking for answers, searching for God. It is offered to help us to know, love and serve Jesus, in order to be happy with him in this life and in the afterlife.

It will hopefully also help parents to teach their children the faith, and help parishioners to witness to inquirers who want to learn more about our faith, and help Church ministers to help parents and parishioners do that. As they say: You can't give what you don't have, right?

What will inspire others to love Jesus, such that they will want to belong to his Catholic Church? Rituals, rules, and the rod of punishment in and of themselves will not, as sure as cold butter don't spread.

Rather, what's attractive is knowing about the person of Jesus, his teachings, his saving deeds, and the way of life he shows to his followers. What's more, being taught that by someone who loves Jesus, and gives a good example of trying to live by his teachings.

CHRISTIANS

The followers of Jesus are called *Christians*: "It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians." (Acts of the Apostles 11:26)

We are called Christians because Jesus was called the Christ (a title, not his last name). Christ is from Greek, a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah, which means the one anointed with oil.

Anointing with oil was used to indicate that God chooses the person for a special life or mission. In the case of Jesus, he is anointed with the Holy Spirit, not with oil. And his mission is to be the Messiah promised to the

Jewish people, to save humanity from Hell for Heaven, and to inaugurate the kingdom of God.

"[John the Baptist] sent [two of his disciples] to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come [the Messiah], or should we look for another?'" (Luke 7:19) Jesus answered by listing all the signs that he was the Messiah, the one who was to come.

DISCIPLES

A Christian is described as a *disciple* of Jesus. This word is from Latin, meaning one who learns. We learn from the teaching and example of Jesus about how to live in this world, in hope of eternal life in Heaven.

"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27)

CHURCH

You can't be a Christian just by yourself. If you believe in Jesus, the next step is to be baptized. If you were baptized as an infant, the next step is to "own" your Baptism, to make it a guiding force in how you live.

Baptism makes you a member of the family of God, the community of believers, the body of Christ, the Church. Jesus said that he would build his Church on the rock of Peter's faith, namely, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:18)

The word Church is from Greek, and when it's spelled in upper case, it refers to the assembly of people who belong to the Lord by their profession of faith and by being baptized. We are Christians who belong to Jesus' Catholic Church.

The word catholic is from Greek, meaning universal. When Catholic is spelled in upper case, it's the proper name of our Church. When it's spelled in lower case (such as in the Apostles' Creed), it refers to an attribute of the Church, that it's a universal Church.

When the word church is spelled in lower case, it refers to the building where the assembly of believers go for prayer, either alone or with others, and where they gather together for worship at Holy Mass.

SACRED SCRIPTURE

Catholics are first and foremost followers of Jesus. We love Jesus. We have a personal relationship with Jesus in his holy Catholic Church. We are his friends. **Friendship with Jesus begins and deepens by knowing him.**

We learn about Jesus from the written record in Sacred Scripture, the Bible, and from what has been passed on by his followers through Sacred Tradition.

The Bible is not one book, but a collection of 73 books. The first part of the Bible, called the Old Testament, has 46 books of the history, law, and prophecies of the Jewish religion. Christians read the Old Testament too because we believe Jesus is the Messiah promised to the Jewish people.

The second part of the Bible, called the New Testament, has 27 books that tell the story of Jesus, and the faith of his first followers. There were other writings about Jesus, but by the beginning of the 5th Century, the bishops of the Catholic Church had decided that only these reflected the true faith about Jesus.

The bishops of the Catholic Church declared that the 73 books of the Bible were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to record without error those things needed for our salvation.

We can encounter Jesus through the Sacred Scriptures a number of ways: at Holy Mass, in the Readings and in the Mass prayers; by praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the prayer of the Church, which is made up of Psalms; and by a prayer practice called *lectio divina*, Latin for divine (or holy, prayerful) reading of the Bible.

We are encouraged to read the Bible as a great help to the practice of our holy Catholic Faith; it has the power to change lives. Consider the examples of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Ignatius of Loyola, and Augustine of Hippo. They each had an encounter with Jesus through reading the Scriptures that changed them in such a way as to merit the title “Saint” before their names.

Listen to the Blind Willie Johnson song: “I’ve got a Bible in my home. If I don’t read it, and my soul gets lost, it’s nobody’s fault but mine.”

Read the Bible, yes, and think about what it means for you. But when it comes to what we believe and how we live our Catholic Faith, the Magisterium has the final word. That word is from Latin, meaning teacher, and it refers to the teaching authority of the Pope and the bishops in union with him, under the guidance of the Spirit.

An example of the Magisterium is when the Apostles met to decide if non-Jewish converts to Christianity had to obey the law of Moses. They wrote their decision in a letter to some of these converts: “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities.” (Acts of the Apostles 15:28)

SACRED TRADITION

We also learn about Jesus from what *wasn’t* written down, but handed down orally from Jesus to his Apostles, and by them to their successors, the bishops of the Catholic Church. We call this Sacred Tradition, from

Latin, meaning to pass something down.

We believe that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, just like Scripture, and that it has the same authority as Scripture. Together, Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition make up what's called the deposit of faith.

When Tradition is spelled in upper case, it refers to this authoritative source of teaching, revealed by God and affirmed by the Church, which we have access to especially in Church doctrine, worship, and faith practices.

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

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

When tradition is spelled in lower case, it refers to prayers, or devotions, or stories associated with the saints. These traditions might be inspired by the Spirit, but not necessarily, and they aren't authoritative for what we believe and how we live as Christians.

WHO IS THE LORD JESUS?

What we know from Scripture and Tradition is that Jesus lived 2000 years ago in Judea, present-day Israel. He was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, and died but rose again in Jerusalem.

Jesus worked as a carpenter until, at age 30, he began his public ministry. He worked miracles and preached the Gospel, from Greek, meaning Good News. In the case of Jesus, it is the Gospel of the kingdom of God.

HOLY TRINITY

We believe that Jesus is one of the three Divine Persons in the one Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This mystery of faith is called the Holy Trinity. Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the only begotten Son of God, who became man.

"After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" (Matthew 3:16-17)

INCARNATION

We believe that the only begotten Son of God received a human nature like ours (except, as God, he never sinned), and was born of the Virgin Mary. This mystery of faith is called the incarnation, from Latin, meaning to be made flesh.

"The Word was God... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1, 14)

By becoming man, Jesus put flesh on the mystery of the unseen God, and enabled people to see, hear, feel, and touch the glory of Divinity revealed by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai:

"So the Lord passed before [Moses] and proclaimed: The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity." (Exodus 34:6)

The early Christians found an easy way to summarize what they believed about Jesus, God and man. They made an acronym out of the five letters that spell the Greek word for fish: i-ch-th-y-s spells out *Iesous-Christos-Theou-Yios-Soter*, which translates as "Jesus-Christ-God-Son-Savior." Pretty cool, huh?

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

This is probably a good spot to say something about the place and privileges of Mary, the Mother of the Lord Jesus.

The immaculate conception: Mary was the mother of the sinless savior. So, as original sin is transmitted through human generation, God prepared Mary for her role by preserving her from original sin. She was saved by Jesus, but in a special way, in anticipation of the event on Calvary Hill.

"Hail [Mary] full of grace! The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:28)

The virginal conception: Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. St. Joseph was the

husband of Mary, but he was not Jesus' biological father (he was his foster-father).

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

The perpetual virginity of Mary: Mary and Joseph did not have other children, either before or after the birth of Jesus. It is believed that Mary and Joseph had taken vows renouncing sexual intimacy, even though they were married. Scholars also say that the mention in the Gospel of the brothers and sisters of the Lord could be Joseph's children from a previous marriage, or cousins.

"[Joseph] took [Mary] his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus." (Matthew 1:24-25)

The Mother of Christians: From the Cross, Jesus asked Mary and the apostle John to regard each other as mother and child. Christians have traditionally seen themselves as represented by John, which would make Mary our spiritual mother. This would also be the case on account of Christians being members of the body of Christ, the Church.

"[Jesus] said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother.'" (John 19:26-27)

The assumption: At the moment of her death, Mary didn't lie in a grave, while her body corrupted. Rather, she was taken up body and soul into the glory of Heaven. This event gives credence to our great Christian hope in our own resurrection and eternal life.

“And when this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility, and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: Death is swallowed up in victory.”

(1 Corinthians 15:54)

When we consider all the above, it’s hard to see how the sappy words of a popular hymn apply to Mary: gentle woman, quiet light, peaceful dove, indeed.

More appropriate are the words from the Song of Songs (6:10), traditionally applied to Mary: “Who is this that comes forth like the dawn, beautiful as the white moon, pure as the blazing sun, fearsome as celestial visions?” That’s what we’re talking about!

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?

The Gospels tell us that large crowds traveled long distances with great excitement to see Jesus, and to witness a miracle.

A miracle is something that can't be explained by the laws of nature. The miracles Jesus worked include things like...

- Changing water into wine (this was his first miracle)
- Feeding thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread and a few fish
- Giving sight to the blind
- Giving hearing to the deaf
- Giving speech to the mute
- Enabling the lame to walk
- Healing the sick
- Restoring the dead to life

After seeing Jesus and the miracles he worked, people were more open to listen to his teaching; in fact, his teaching was often accompanied by miracles, especially healing.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The main theme of Jesus' teaching was the kingdom of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

Here is one way to sum up the message of the kingdom of God:

- 1) We are sinners in need of a savior to save us from Hell for Heaven.
- 2) We have a savior, Jesus, who redeems us by his death and resurrection.
- 3) We are saved when we put faith in Jesus, are baptized, and belong to his Church.

- 4) We are saved by the kind of faith that makes its power felt through love.
- 5) We will enjoy the bliss of Heaven if we persevere in believing in Jesus, confessing to a priest when we sin gravely, and living the teachings of Jesus and his Catholic Church.

Jesus preached that living in the kingdom is kind of like standing on your head; it's upside-down in relation to the world, for example: "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35); "The one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11); "Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." (Luke 9:24)

LOVE OF GOD AND FOR GOD

The Gospel of John teaches that the death and resurrection of Jesus was prompted by Divine Love: "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)

The love of God is unconditional and unbounded. We can't earn it, or lose it. St. Catherine of Siena says that God is like someone drunk or crazy with love for us: it doesn't make sense. Out of love, God creates us, provides for us, saves us, accompanies us on life's journey, and longingly awaits to be united with us in Heaven.

The first and the greatest Commandment is to love God with all we've got. But there's no way we can ever return the same depth and intensity of love that God has for us. God's love is undeserved. We on the other hand owe love to God, God deserves it.

We show love for God by praying, by worshipping at Holy Mass, by obeying the Ten Commandments, and cooperating with God's plan for our

vocation. But because we are limited, so is our love, and truth be told we often do these things hoping for some payback from God.

The closest way we have of making a proper return to God for his love for us is by loving our neighbor.

"In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another." (1 John 4:9-11)

LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR

The following passage is, in a nutshell, what Jesus taught about the love of neighbor practiced by his followers. This might be worth memorizing, more importantly, practicing:

"Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you... For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." (Luke 6:36-38)

To love our neighbor as we are loved by God is THE sign that we are living under the reign of God. (Mark 12:28-34)

And in response to a question about who is our neighbor, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, teaching that anyone in need is our neighbor, and has a claim on our loving care and concern. (Luke 10:29-37)

To serve the poor is the word of faith planted in our hearts, that we are to

put into practice by our service to people who can't protect or provide for themselves. (James 1:21-22)

This service to the poor is the epitome of a pure and unspoiled religion, (James 1:27) which can preserve us in holiness until Jesus comes again. (1 Thessalonians 3:13)

And on that day, Jesus will judge us on whether or not we loved our neighbor: those who did will enjoy Heaven, but those who did not, will not. (Matthew 25:31-46)

Serving the poor heals our souls, and covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8) It is also a medicine to heal the Church in its members, wounded by the selfishness of sin.

Love for the poor is the most important religious practice for the followers of Jesus. Consider that when St. Paul asked Church leaders to approve the message he preached to the gentiles, they didn't make him change anything, but only insisted, "we were to be mindful of the poor, which is the very thing I was eager to do." (Galatians 2:10)

JESUS PROMISES ETERNAL LIFE

We believe that by his death, resurrection and ascension, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus makes it possible for us to enjoy Heaven.

Death is not the end of our life, nor are we merely resuscitated, nor are we reincarnated as someone or something else. No, we ourselves will live forever in Heaven.

God made us in order to share Heaven with us, not because God is lacking anything, but because it's the nature of God to live to give the fullness of life and gladness to us.

Heaven is felt as the sublime bliss derived from the quieting of our desires, because they are all satisfied by our perfect union with God, all of them, at once, completely and forever, because God is the fullness of all the goods we crave.

If the good thing you crave is chili cheese flavored Frito brand corn chips, then in Heaven that craving will be quieted, because it will be completely and forever satisfied by your union with God, who is the quintessence of chili cheese flavored Frito brand corn chip-ness. Eternal rest, it's called.

HELL

Can you imagine life without chili cheese flavored Frito brand corn chips? That's Hell.

The Church teaches that Hell exists. Free will makes sin possible. And justice demands punishment for sin. Hell is the eternal punishment for unrepentant mortal sin.

Hell is experienced as the opposite of Heaven: no bliss, because our desiring is not quieted, because instead of union with God, there is eternal separation from God.

We don't know if anyone is damned in Hell. The Church has a process to declare with certainty that a person is in Heaven, but *not* if a person is in Hell.

It's possible that no one is there, if for no other reason than because so little is needed for us to receive God's mercy. The prodigal son only had to turn back home. The good thief, at the last minute, had only to make a simple prayer.

Or consider the woman who cried out to her pastor, St. John Vianney, scared that her husband might have gone to Hell for jumping off a bridge to his death. He replied: "I tell you he is saved. He is in Purgatory, and you must pray for him. Between the bridge and the water, he had time to make an Act of Contrition."

If anyone is in Hell, it is their fault, their fault, their most grievous fault, due to their sinful thoughts and words, by what they've done and what they've failed to do, especially failing to help the poor, and by their stubborn refusal to say sorry for it.

PURGATORY

Sacred Heart church in Rome has a display of signs alleged to be left by the Poor Souls in Purgatory to convince people that Purgatory exists, and to get them to pray that the Poor Souls be delivered from its purifying fires. For example, the image of a man's sad face appeared on a wall after a fire, or various items that had once belonged to a dead person were found to be singed by fire.

We aren't required to believe that the items in Sacred Heart church are real, but Catholics do believe in Purgatory. The word is from Latin, meaning to purge, or purify.

Purgatory is the final purification that people who die in God's good graces may need to undergo before entering Heaven.

The Bible says that nothing unclean can enter Heaven. (Revelation 21:27) So, even those who are judged worthy of Heaven, may need to be cleansed from venial sins, or from what's called the temporal punishment due to mortal sins that were forgiven.

Temporal punishment? Think of it like this: If I break your window, justice demands that I say that I'm sorry, and that I have the window fixed. If I die before fulfilling what justice demands from my forgiven mortal sins, then justice still has to be satisfied.

So, how's that done after death in Purgatory? Some guess that justice is fulfilled by the suffering that results from the slightest delay of the perfect bliss of Heaven. Some compare Purgatory to a purifying fire. (1 Corinthians 3:15)

We can help to quicken the final purification of the Poor Souls in Purgatory by our prayer, self-denial, and almsgiving on their behalf. Using the example of the broken window, justice demands that I repair it, but my family and friends might chip in to help me out of love for me.

It's a spiritual work of mercy to do penance, or give alms, or pray for the faithful departed in Purgatory:

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

There are many other things that Jesus taught, which are written down in the Gospels, and many things that are not written down. In fact, the apostle John ends his Gospel by saying, "There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25)

WHAT DID JESUS DO?

After working miracles and preaching for about three years, Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem, sentenced by the Romans to die on the cross, was buried in a tomb, and after three days he rose again from the dead.

This happened at the time when Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor, and Herod was king of the Jews. The death and resurrection of Jesus is why we call him our Savior, a word from Greek, meaning one who rescues from harm.

THE NEED FOR A SAVIOR

Why do we need a savior?

We believe that the first Person of the Trinity, God the Father almighty, created everything out of nothing, gave order to what is created, and sustains it all in being.

The highpoint of creation is humanity, made in the image and likeness of God, with an intellect and free will, and created to live a blessed life of bliss in union with God.

To live in this relationship, however, women and men have to acknowledge that God is God, that God decides what is good and evil, and that humanity does good and avoids evil accordingly.

Our first parents, called Adam and Eve, rebelled against the sovereignty of God, insisting on a relationship with God on *their* terms; this is called the original sin.

The consequence for their pride and disobedience is the loss of the blessed life of bliss, as well as eternal and perfect union with God.

We believe that, since then, every human being is born with original sin, transmitted through human generation. It's as if this sin dealt all human beings a mortal wound.

That mortal wound is what we need to be saved from, but there's no way we could do it. Why? Because, as sin is an offense against the infinite all-holy God, we would have to be infinite like God, and able to do something of infinite value to heal the wound of original sin. We aren't, and we can't. Jesus is, and did, by his death and resurrection.

JESUS DIED

Jesus' death is called the work of redemption. This word is from Latin, meaning to pay off a debt, like criminals paying their debt to society by spending time in prison.

By his death, Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves: satisfy the debt of sin, and so save us from Hell for Heaven.

Jesus said, in reference to himself: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

St. Paul often referred to what Jesus did, and most especially *why* he did it: "I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me." (Galatians 2:20)

JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Jesus didn't just die, and lie in a grave, while his body corrupted. On the third day after his death, the first Easter Sunday, Jesus rose again.

An angel said to the women at the empty tomb on Easter morning: "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him." (Mark 16:6)

This mystery of faith is called the resurrection. This word is from Latin, meaning to rise again. The Apostles saw the risen Jesus, spoke with him, touched him, and ate with him. He was the same, yet also somehow different. (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)

Jesus rose from the dead to assure his followers of the promise of eternal life in Heaven: "For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all." (1 Corinthians 15:16-19)

For this reason, the resurrection is also part of Jesus' work to redeem us, to save us from Hell for Heaven.

JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

Following his resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with his followers, trying to help them understand that he was risen from the dead, and about the kingdom of God. After that, Jesus ascended into Heaven. This word is from Latin, meaning to lift or go up.

"As they were looking on, [Jesus] was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight." (Acts of the Apostles 1:9)

Jesus consoled his followers by explaining the reason for his ascension: "It is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7)

JESUS SENT THE HOLY SPIRIT

After returning to Heaven, Jesus sent his followers the Holy Spirit, who is the Third Divine Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as the Paraclete (from Greek) or Advocate (from Latin), both of which mean helper.

The first outpouring of the Holy Spirit was on Pentecost, from the Greek, meaning fiftieth. In the Jewish religion, fifty days after Passover is the Feast of Weeks (a harvest festival). The first Christians were celebrating this feast when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

“And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind... Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire.” (Acts of the Apostles 2:2-3)

Scripture often refers to the revelation of Divine Glory in terms of bright light and loud sound, such as fire and lightning, or rushing wind and thunder, for example: “When [Moses] looked, although the bush was on fire, it was not being consumed.” (Exodus 3:2) And “[Jesus] was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.” (Mark 9:2-3)

The event of Pentecost is regarded as the birth of the Church, not the building, but the assembly of people who believe in Jesus and are baptized. **All Christians are responsible for continuing the mission of Jesus in the ministries of the Church.** But to do this, we need to have the gift of the Spirit, and cooperate with the Spirit’s power.

The Holy Spirit is active in us to the extent that we know our need, crying out for God’s help. Here is an effective way to invite the Holy Spirit to be active in us:

- 1) Write down, or give voice to your need for God's help, and then...
- 2) Act on this conviction, first of all by confessing your sins to a priest, and by...
- 3) Making peace with others, asking pardon from them, or pardoning them, and by...
- 4) Getting rid of anything that is a source of temptation, or an occasion of sin, and by...
- 5) Practicing daily prayer, Sunday Mass, living the Commandments, Bible reading, serving the poor, and being involved in your parish, and then...
- 6) Invite the Spirit to be active in your life, enabling you to love like Jesus:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in me the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and I shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

What is the evidence that these steps worked for us? If we are able to say, in the Spirit of Jesus' love: I live to give life and gladness to others!

JESUS WILL COME AGAIN

We believe Jesus will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. This is called Judgement Day, or the Day of the Lord. But no one except God the Father knows the day or the hour of Jesus' Second Coming. (Matthew 24:36)

St. Peter wrote: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out." (2 Peter 3:10)

We shouldn't however fear the Day of the Lord, any more than we would a visit from our beloved Grandma. Christians look forward to Jesus' Second Coming; in fact, an ancient prayer of Christians is "Marana tha," which are two Aramaic words (the language Jesus spoke), meaning "Come, Lord." (1 Corinthians 16:22)

WHAT IS THE WAY OF LIFE JESUS SHOWS TO HIS FOLLOWERS?

After learning about the person of Jesus, his teaching and his saving deeds, we are invited to believe in Jesus and his promises, to be baptized (if we aren't already), and to live out our Baptism by practicing our holy Catholic Faith; it is, after all, a way of life.

St. Pope John Paul II, on his first visit to France, repeatedly cried out the question: "What have you done with your Baptism?" It was a rhetorical question, for they had done nothing; the members of the Catholic Church of France had for the most part fallen away from the practice of their faith.

Being saved is dynamic, not static. We can't one day accept Jesus as our savior, and then forget about it. It's possible for us to forfeit the gift of eternal life by the same kind of pride and disobedience as Adam and Eve.

So, we need to have in our hearts and on our lips a profession of faith: I do believe in Jesus as Son of God and Savior. I can be forgiven by Jesus' mercy. I will try until I die to live according to the teachings of Jesus and his Catholic Church.

We try by "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12), and by "faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6)

How do we practice our holy Catholic Faith? The leaders of the Catholic Church, from their study of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, have identified essential elements of the way of life that Jesus shows to his disciples:

PRAYER

Like conversation between friends, prayer is needed to start and maintain a relationship with God; if we stop praying, the relationship weakens and dies.

Therefore, **some kind of prayer should be part of daily life for a follower of Jesus**, in order to keep our friendship with him alive. As MC Hammer sang: "You've got to pray just to make it today." Word!

Prayer is described as lifting up our minds and hearts to God, to express love, sorrow for sin, gratitude, or need. Prayer is also described as a dialogue with God.

As with any conversation, prayer starts on a surface level, maybe reciting written prayers, but it eventually goes deeper, more intimate, using fewer words.

One kind of prayer is called vocal prayer: reciting words someone else wrote, like praying the Rosary, or speaking out loud words from our own mind and heart.

Another kind of prayer is called mental prayer: thinking about, or meditating about God, or a teaching of Jesus. An example is *lectio divina*, prayerful reading of the Bible.

Jesus prayed, and when his followers saw him pray, and maybe also the effect prayer had on him, inspiring in him clarity and action, they begged him: teach us to pray.

Jesus taught them the Our Father, also known as The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13):

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.

Some Bible scholars say the Our Father is made up of individual prayers stitched together into one.

It begins by addressing God as Our Father, which we would only dare do because Jesus tells us we are God's children, and because the Holy Spirit puts the word in our mouths. This is a prayer of love, just to say the Holy Name of God.

After calling God, Father, we say hallowed be Thy Name. This is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. It's a form of a speech common in Semitic languages, such as Hebrew and Arabic. For example, whenever Muslims mention the name of their Prophet, they follow up by saying "Peace be upon him."

When we say Thy kingdom come, we are asking, hoping, that God be introduced into day-to-day life, and vice-versa, removing the boundaries between Heaven and Earth.

An important way to live in the kingdom of God is to do God's will, just as the angels and saints in Heaven do. We do God's will when we say "Yes" to God's plan for our vocation, or when we obey the Ten Commandments.

We beg God to give us this day our daily bread, acknowledging our dependence on God for what we need to live with dignity, but also for spiritual food, such as the Bible and Holy Communion. This is a prayer of petition.

We beg God to forgive us our trespasses, our sins, remembering Jesus' teaching that we will be forgiven if we forgive, that God will be generous with mercy to us as we are towards others. This is a prayer of contrition, sorrow for sin.

Finally, we beg God that we might be delivered from the temptation of the devil, and from both doing and suffering evil.

In addition to the Our Father, Catholics should commit certain prayers to memory, especially so they can pray together with others, like reciting the Holy Rosary:

The Sign of the Cross – In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed – I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into Hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The Hail Mary – 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.

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

The Act of Contrition – My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.

In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

CELEBRATE THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

We believe Jesus started seven sacraments, which use outward signs (like water, or oil) to give us grace, a share in the very life of God, putting us in relationship to God and other believers. The sacraments are: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance (Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony (Marriage), and Holy Orders.

Baptism takes away original sin and any other sins for which we are guilty. Also, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we become the adopted children of God, as well as the brothers and sisters of all in the family of God.

The sign of Baptism is pouring water over a person's head three times, while saying "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We are baptized only once.

"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)

Confirmation strengthens the gifts of the Holy Spirit received at Baptism, especially for the purpose of continuing the mission of Jesus in the ministries of the Church. We are chosen by God for a special work: to share the Gospel with others by our words and by our service of the poor.

Confirmation is normally celebrated by a bishop, who lays hands on the person, and anoints the forehead with the Oil of Sacred Chrism, while saying "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." We are confirmed only once.

"[The Samaritans] had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then [Peter and John] laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts of the Apostles 8:16-17)

The Eucharist is spiritual food that nourishes our life in Christ. Receiving the Eucharist is the most intimate union we can have with God this side of Heaven. It also deepens the bond of spiritual friendship with the others who receive it.

The Eucharist is celebrated at Mass (called the Liturgy of the Eucharist), and received in Holy Communion, and worshipped in Adoration. The signs of the sacrament are bread and wine, which, when a priest invokes the Holy Spirit and repeats Jesus' words from the Last Supper, become the Body and Blood of Christ. We are required to receive the Eucharist at least once a year, during the Easter season, but we can receive it daily.

"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you... [Jesus] took bread... and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"
(1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

In *Penance or Confession*, our sins are forgiven when we are sorry (which includes intending to avoid sin in the future), confess to a priest, and the priest says "I absolve you of your sins." Sin can weaken, and even destroy our relationship with God and the community of believers; Confession restores it. Phew!

The priest gives us a penance to perform in order to repair the spiritual damage from our sins: prayer, self-denial, or charity to the poor. We must confess our mortal sins at least once a year, but it's a good practice to go to Confession once a month.

"Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." (John 20:23)

Anointing of the Sick can bring healing, forgiveness of sins, and the strength to walk with Jesus under the weight of suffering. This sacrament brings the hand of God to heal us, or the passionate presence of Jesus to suffer with us.

Anointing is celebrated when a priest lays his hands on the sick person, prays over her/him, and anoints her/him with the Oil of the Sick. It can be received as often as needed when we are sick, suffering, or in danger of death.

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

A baptized man and a baptized woman enter *Holy Matrimony or Marriage* when they freely intend to stay together until death, to be faithful to each other, willing to welcome children, and say "I do" in the presence of a clergyman and two witnesses.

Marriage is like God at the Creation, saying let there be light, and there was. In Marriage, a man and woman say I do, and something new is created; they become one flesh. People can only be married once, unless one of the spouses die, or unless the Church grants a decree of nullity.

“Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

In *Holy Orders* a baptized man is ordained a deacon, priest, or bishop to preach, celebrate sacraments, and to exercise servant leadership in the Church. The man is more closely identified, or conformed to Christ as teacher, or as one who brings others into contact with Divinity, or as the Good Shepherd of souls.

Ordination is celebrated by a bishop, by the laying on of hands and anointing with the Oil of Sacred Chrism (except for a deacon). A man is ordained a deacon only once, but a deacon can be ordained again as a priest, and a priest can be ordained again as a bishop.

“Therefore, it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us... become with us a witness to [Jesus] resurrection.” (Acts of the Apostles 1:21-22)

“Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom... They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.” (Acts of the Apostles 6:3-6)

WORSHIP AT SUNDAY MASS

Of the seven Sacraments, the celebration of the Eucharist at Holy Mass, especially on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, is important for the practice of our holy Catholic Faith.

Participation in Mass is the ordinary way we keep holy the Lord’s Day; it is right and just, our duty and salvation to worship God at Sunday Mass.

Mass is called the summit of our Christian lives. We go to Mass to give praise and thanks to God, for everything from our life's breath to ketchup on our French Fries. We also ask God for what we and others need, again, everything from life's breath...

Mass is also called the source of our Christian lives. What we hear and say, give and receive prepares us to practice our faith outside of church, on Monday, where we live, and move, and have our being.

That's why, at the end of Mass, we're dismissed with the words: "Go! You are sent!" This isn't permission to leave, but a command to go and transform the world into the kingdom of God.

When we receive the Eucharist, our life in Christ is nourished, and we are sent out to give life and gladness to others, like Christ. Here's one way of understanding the link between our mission to transform the world and Holy Mass:

At the Last Supper, when Jesus gave us the priesthood and the Eucharist, he used wheat bread and grape wine.

Maybe Jesus had to use bread and wine because the law of Moses required it, but maybe he used them because they express the essence of his life, and ours.

Wheat is ground to make flour, which is baked into bread, becoming the staff of life. Grapes are crushed for their juice, which is made into wine, to bring us gladness.

It is the fulfillment of wheat and grapes to be ground and crushed. You might say that they live to give life and gladness to others.

That is also the fulfillment of Jesus. He said: No one takes my life from me. I lay it down freely. I live to give life and gladness to others. (John 10)

That's also the fulfillment of Christians. Consider this: **Jesus took up his cross to do for others what they couldn't do for themselves, to give life and gladness to others.**

Taking up our cross involves at least in part doing the same: serving, sacrificing to do for others what they can't do for themselves, to give them life and gladness. Any suffering involved in that comes from the loss of something as a result of sharing.

That's one way of understanding what Jesus said at the Last Supper: "Do this in memory of me."

Service, sacrifice, sharing, living to give life and gladness are essential practices of our Catholic religion, as much as going to Sunday Mass, confessing our sins to a priest, studying the Catechism, and eating fish sticks on Friday.

An elaborated catechism on the Holy Mass, titled The Fourth H, is available on the website for the Archdiocese of Dubuque. The title refers to "how to celebrate Holy Mass." The other three H's are: hospitality, hymns, and the homily.

CONFESS OUR SINS TO A PRIEST.

As mentioned earlier, we are obliged to confess our sins to a priest at least once a year, if we're guilty of mortal sin.

About sin: We say that it's "sinful" to think, speak, or act in a way that is contrary to the law of God, especially the Ten Commandments, and even more the commandments to love God first and most, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

But we say we are “sinners” when we know we’re *guilty* of sin, that is, blameworthy, knowing full well that the thought, word, or deed in question was indeed a sin against God, and we deliberately, freely chose to do it anyway.

It is called a venial sin when the bad thing that’s actually done (a sin of commission), or the good thing that’s not done (a sin of omission) is not so serious in and of itself, or when there were unavoidable limits to our knowledge or freedom. The word venial is from Latin, meaning pardonable.

Venial sin can be forgiven by confessing it to a priest, but also outside of Confession, for example: by saying what’s called a perfect Act of Contrition, that is, our sorrow for sin is inspired more by love of God than by fear of Hell; by participating in Mass and worthily receiving Holy Communion; or by saying prayers, by doing acts of self-denial, and by giving money to the poor.

It is called a mortal sin when the bad thing that’s actually done, or the good thing that’s not done, is serious in and of itself, and we’re fully aware of that fact, and our choice to sin is fully ours, fully free. The word mortal is from Latin, meaning deadly; it is said to kill the life of Christ (grace) that we receive at Baptism.

Mortal sin is ordinarily only forgiven by confessing it to a priest, with sorrow, and planning to avoid that sin in the future. So, if we’re guilty of mortal sin, we should run, not walk to the nearest priest for Confession.

In extraordinary circumstances, when it’s not possible to confess to a priest, we can receive forgiveness for our mortal sins by saying a perfect Act of Contrition, with the intention to mention that sin in Confession to a priest as soon as that’s possible.

Going to Confession is powerful to help us grow up, and to become holy, to be more like Jesus. Therefore, it's a good idea to go to Confession regularly, say, once a month. Here are some other reasons that the Sacrament of Confession is recommended to us:

- 1) Jesus gave priests authority to forgive sins in his name. (John 20:23) The priest is a minister of God's forgiveness, trying to imitate the love and mercy of Jesus.
- 2) The apostle James tells us we can find healing by confessing our sins. (James 5:16)
- 3) The absolution the priest speaks in Confession assures us that God has forgiven our sins; no need to worry if we were sorry enough, or if we confessed correctly.
- 4) Even if the priest in Confession doesn't say anything other than "I absolve you from your sins" there is still great benefit, just from examining our conscience, taking responsibility for our actions, doing penance (restorative justice), and telling our sins out loud.
- 5) The priest isn't allowed to tell anyone what we confessed, and so Confession is a safe place to tell our sins, and to receive spiritual counsel.
- 6) The priest has heard it all before, and is a sinner like us, so there's no need for us to be afraid or embarrassed.
- 7) Going to Confession reminds us that, no matter what sins we confess, or how often we sin, we are always loved by God with a love that we can neither earn nor lose.
- 8) Going to Confession makes the angels and saints rejoice. (Luke 15:7)

- 9) And though we might dread the thought of confessing our sins to a priest, most people feel great afterwards, like a heavy weight is lifted off our shoulders.

With regard to the examination of conscience mentioned above, the most widely practiced way to help us acknowledge our sins is to ask ourselves if and how well we have obeyed the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17):

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Jesus said that he came to fulfill the Commandments, not to abolish them. (Matthew 5:17) One way he did that is by broadening or deepening our understanding of them. For example, murder is a sin, but so is hating someone; adultery is a sin, but so is lusting after someone. (Matthew 5:22, 28)

Another way he did that is by teaching that love of God and love of neighbor, even an enemy, especially an enemy, fulfill the Commandments. (Matthew 22:36-40) In fact, the first three Commandments are about proper love of God, and the last seven, right love of neighbor.

There is an examination of conscience on the website for the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

VOCATION

We also practice our holy Catholic Faith by learning and living God's plan for our life, our vocation.

All people have at least four vocations, or calls from God: (1) to go to Heaven, (2) to become holy by imitating Jesus, (3) to support the mission of the Church, and (4) to a state in life as a single or a married person, as a sister or a priest in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

Of the four vocations, the last one, the call to a state in life, is the most important, because when we know, embrace, and live our state in life, that has a huge impact on our other calls: to mission (evangelization), to holiness (imitation of Christ), and to Heaven (our true home).

And that's because whatever we do is conditioned by our state in life; we do whatever as a single or married person, as a sister or a priest in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

From all eternity, God has a plan for each person's state in life. Our responsibility is to learn God's plan, and then say "Yes" to it, and live it to the best of our ability.

The payoff is enjoying happiness and fulfillment, and then having the best chance of making the world a better place.

"[Jesus] summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him. He appointed twelve... that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach." (Mark 3:13-14)

An elaborated catechism on vocation is available on the website for the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

STEWARDSHIP

Practicing stewardship is still another way of practicing our holy Catholic Faith. What does the Church teach about stewardship?

First, we don't own anything. Everything is on loan to us from God, and not just money, but also who we are, what we can do, and what we possess.

Second, all is entrusted to us by God to manage for God. The word manage comes from the Greek word for economy. And another word for that is stewardship: to manage or care for someone else's property according to the desire of the owner.

Third, the desire of the owner, God, is that we use what is entrusted to us to benefit ourselves, those who are dependent on us, the mission of the Church, and the poor.

Fourth, there is no uniform practice of stewardship; it will look different for each person depending on what God has entrusted to us, and on our personal circumstances.

Stewardship is practiced by freely, generously, even sacrificially sharing our time, talent and treasure, not compelled by the threat of punishment, or the promise of a reward.

That being said, people who practice stewardship will tell you that God always provides an abundance of what we are willing to share with others. Jesus taught that "the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." (Luke 6:38)

So, if we're willing to share nothing, God will make sure we have an abundance of nothing. But if we share generously, then "a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap." (Luke 6:38)

We're supposed to do something with what God entrusts to our management, our stewardship. If we do nothing, well, God may greet us with the words from Jesus' parable: you wicked and lazy servant. (Matthew 25:26)

Our time, talent, and treasure are like manure: if all you do is let it pile up, it will stink and draw flies, but if you spread it around, it produces abundant fruit.

We manage time, talent and treasure according to God's purpose, but also creation: making it prosper and grow using it, but not selfishly, or for sordid gain.

An elaborated catechism on stewardship is available on the website for the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

CONCLUSION

So, who is Jesus? He is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the only begotten Son of God, become man, giving flesh to Divine Love and Mercy.

What did Jesus teach? A lot, but the most important teaching is to love God by means of prayer, worship and doing God's will, and to love our neighbor, who is anyone in need.

What did Jesus do? He loved us, and gave himself up for us, to save us from Hell for Heaven.

What is the way of life Jesus asks of his followers? We can use the fingers on our hands to summarize and memorize the beliefs and way of life for followers of Jesus in his Catholic Church:

Our pinky, our weakest finger, represents the need for us to acknowledge that we're too weak to pay the debt due our sins, and so we cry out: "I need a savior!"

Our ring finger, where married couples might sport a ring, represents the wedding of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus, who comes to save.

Our middle finger, rising highest of all fingers (normally), represents our belief that Jesus was raised up high on the cross to save us, and raised up out of the grave to open Heaven for us.

Our index finger, used to summon people, c'mere, represents the invitation for us to repent of sins, put our faith in Jesus, be baptized, and then live a saved life as a member of the Catholic Church.

Our thumb, used to gesture “you’re outta there,” represents the need for us to change to a new way of living, including being chaste, living simply, and serving and sharing with people in need.

In brief: If we admit our need for a savior, and believe that Jesus is God made man, who suffered death to redeem us, and rose from the grave to open heaven to us, then we are promised happiness here and in the hereafter.

On the other hand, our fingers can be used to summarize and memorize the important practices of our new way of life...

When we acknowledge that we’re weak, like our pinky, we know we need God’s help, and so we pray each day for God’s help, and in thanksgiving for God’s help.

Our ring finger reminds us that, just as Jesus became one with us, he wants us to become one with him, by worthily receiving Holy Communion at Sunday Mass.

Our middle finger reminds us, that as Jesus was raised on the Cross for the forgiveness of sin, we should regularly confess our venial and mortal sins to a priest.

The index finger is used by a teacher to point to a lesson to learn. Just so, it reminds us of the need to feed our faith by reading and studying the Bible and the Catechism.

The thumb is used by a hitchhiker to ask: Going my way? Just so, it reminds us of the great commission we received from Jesus to ask people to go our Catholic way, to share our beliefs with others, accompanied by the witness of our example of giving and forgiving. This is the “butter at room temperature” that readily spreadies.

In brief: pray every day; go to Sunday Mass; go to Confession regularly; study the Bible and the Catechism; and witness by forgiving others and giving to the poor.

Now put those two hands together, matching the fingers of one hand to those of the other, like a mirror, and you have a way to understand the message of the Good News of Jesus. And with those same two hands joined together, pray:

- to persevere in the practice of your holy Catholic Faith;
- to be a good witness, that others will be attracted to follow Jesus because of your lived example;
- to answer God's call to Heaven, to holiness, and to mission.

From what we know about who Jesus is, what he did, what he taught, and the way of life he shows to his followers, what's not to love?

Know the Lord. Love the Lord. Serve the Lord out of love. And therein find your happiness and fulfillment in this world and in the next. Then help others who are still seeking to do the same. Amen. Alleluia.

+ + +

The Bible is an indispensable tool for learning more about Jesus, what he taught, what he did, and the way of life he asks of his followers. The English translation of the Bible that Catholics use at Holy Mass is called the New American Bible. This is accessible on-line, but a Catholic should really own the book, the Bible, and read it too.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is another resource for learning our holy Catholic Faith. This is likewise accessible on-line, but buy the book in case of an internet crash.

A FOLLOWER OF JESUS IN HIS HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

Discussion/Reflection Questions

INTRODUCTION: PAGES 1-5

1. The goal of the Christian life is “to know, love and serve Jesus, in order to be happy with him in this life and in the afterlife.” How well would you say you are living this goal? In what ways do you think you need to grow in your knowledge, love, and service of Jesus?
2. How have you “owned” your Baptism, making it “a guiding force in how you live”? What could you do to better “own” your Baptism and embrace your identity as a Christian disciple—a follower of Jesus?
3. “You can’t be a Christian just by yourself.” What role has “the family of God, the community of believers, the body of Christ, the Church” played in your life? How have other Christian disciples helped you to follow Jesus?
4. In what ways could you become more engaged in the Catholic Church to help you grow as a disciple?
5. “Friendship with Jesus begins and deepens by knowing him.” How would you describe your friendship with Jesus? What are some ways you have come to know him, and what are some actions you could take to deepen your friendship with him?
6. The Bible “has the power to change lives.” Reflect on your experience of reading, hearing, and praying the Scriptures and how your life has been changed as a result. How have you encountered Jesus through the Sacred Scriptures?
7. What practices of engaging with the Scriptures do you need to work on developing? For example, listening more attentively to the readings at Mass, more regular reading of the Bible, practicing *Lectio Divina*, etc.
8. What role have Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church (i.e. “the teaching authority of the Pope and the bishops in union with him, under the guidance of the Spirit”) played in your life as a Christian disciple?

WHO IS THE LORD JESUS?: PAGES 6-9

1. Reflect on the mystery of the Holy Trinity—"three Divine Persons in one Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." What has your relationship with each of the three Divine Persons been like? Which Person would you like to get to know better?
2. "By becoming man, Jesus put flesh on the mystery of the unseen God, and enabled people to see, hear, feel, and touch the glory of Divinity." Sit with that statement and ponder the mystery of the incarnation—that Jesus, the Son of God, became human for our salvation. Then, read John 1:1-18 and prayerfully reflect on that description of the Word (Jesus) becoming flesh (human). What strikes you?
3. If someone were to ask you to describe what you believe about the Blessed Virgin Mary as a Catholic Christian, what would you say? Reread the section entitled "The Blessed Virgin Mary" and try to summarize those teachings in your own words.
4. What role has Mary, the mother of Jesus, played in your life? How have you embraced her as your spiritual mother, and turned to her for inspiration and intercession? What steps could you take to get to know her better?

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?: PAGES 10-16

1. Open up your Bible (or look up the text online), and find the recounting of one of the many miracles of Jesus in any of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John). Read and prayerfully reflect on that passage (e.g. you could read about Jesus' first miracle of changing water into wine in John 2:1-12). What strikes you?
2. In what ways is living in the kingdom of God "kind of like standing on your head; it's upside-down in relation to the world"? How have you experienced this to be the case in your own life?
3. "The love of God is unconditional and unbounded. We can't earn it, or lose it." How does this statement make you feel?
4. What are some practical ways we can follow the first and greatest Commandment: "to love God with all we've got"? How are you doing with following that Commandment? What could you do to better express love for God?
5. What are some practical ways we can follow the second greatest Commandment: "to love our neighbor as we are loved by God"? How are you doing with following that Commandment? What could you do to better love your neighbor (i.e. anyone in need)?
6. "Heaven is felt as the sublime bliss derived from the quieting of our desires, because they are all satisfied by our perfect union with God." Does this statement change your perspective on Heaven at all? How does understanding Heaven in this way affect the way you look at and live life here and now?
7. Based on the section on "Hell," how would you describe it? What must one do to avoid going to Hell?
8. If someone were to ask you to describe what you believe about Purgatory as a Catholic Christian, what would you say? Reread the section entitled "Purgatory" and try to summarize those teachings in your own words. Then, offer a prayer for the souls in Purgatory (you can use the traditional "Eternal rest grant unto them..." prayer or your own words).

WHAT DID JESUS DO?: PAGES 17-22

1. How would you summarize a response to the question, "Why do we need a savior?"
2. Why did Jesus die on the cross? In other words, what was accomplished through his death?
3. What difference does the resurrection of Jesus make? In other words, why is the resurrection so important to our lives as followers of Jesus?
4. What was the reason Jesus ascended into heaven, rather than staying here on earth?
5. What happened on the day of Pentecost, and why does it matter for us as followers of Jesus today?
6. "All Christians are responsible for continuing the mission of Jesus in the ministries of the Church. But to do this, we need to have the gift of the Spirit, and cooperate with the Spirit's power." How has the Holy Spirit worked in your life to help you continue the mission of Jesus in the ministries of the Church? In what ways could you better allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through you in ministry in the Church?
7. Review the list under "Here is an effective way to invite the Holy Spirit to be active in us" in the section on "Jesus sent the Holy Spirit." How are you doing on putting these steps into practice? Which steps do you most need to work on? Ask the Holy Spirit to help: "Come, Holy Spirit..."
8. If Jesus were to come again tomorrow, would you be ready? How are you looking forward to and preparing for Jesus' Second Coming, whenever that may be?

WHAT IS THE WAY OF LIFE JESUS SHOWS HIS FOLLOWERS?: PAGES 23-38

1. How would you respond to the question St. Pope John Paul II repeatedly asked on his first visit to France: "What have you done with your Baptism?"
2. "Some kind of prayer should be part of daily life for a follower of Jesus, in order to keep our friendship with him alive." What is your prayer life like? How could you improve your prayer life? Develop a specific plan to devote time daily to "dialogue with God."
3. If someone asked you to describe what a sacrament is, what would you say? What impact have the sacraments had on your life as a follower of Jesus?
4. "Mass is called the summit of our Christian lives ... Mass is also called the source of our Christian lives." How important is worshipping at Sunday Mass to you? Have you experienced Mass to be the "summit" and "source" of your Christian life? If not, why? If so, how?
5. "Jesus took up his cross to do for others what they couldn't do for themselves, to give life and gladness to others. Taking up our cross involves at least in part doing the same: serving, sacrificing to do for others what they can't do for themselves, to give them life and gladness." How have you taken up your cross and given life and gladness to others?
6. "Going to Confession is powerful to help us grow up, and to become holy, to be more like Jesus. Therefore, it's a good idea to go to Confession regularly, say, once a month." What has been your experience of going to Confession? What difference has it made in your life?
7. "From all eternity, God has a plan for each person's state in life. Our responsibility is to learn God's plan, and then say 'Yes' to it, and live it to the best of our ability." If you have not yet discovered the state in life to which God is calling you ("as a single or a married person, or as a sister or a priest"), what action steps could you take to discern your vocation? If you are already living in a particular state in life, what action steps could you take to "live it to the best of your ability"?
8. "Stewardship is practiced by freely, generously, even sacrificially sharing our time, talent and treasure, not compelled by the threat of punishment, or the promise of a reward." How have you freely, generously, and even sacrificially shared your time, talent and treasure with others? In what ways could you better practice stewardship as a way of life?

CONCLUSION: PAGES 39-41

1. In the conclusion, Archbishop Jackels outlines how to “use the fingers on our hands to summarize and memorize the beliefs and way of life for followers of Jesus in his Catholic Church.” Read through the two lists again. What strikes you in this summary of beliefs (on one hand) and way of life (on the other hand)? Which of the “way of life” items do you most need to work on practicing? Take some time to work on memorizing these two lists so you can use your fingers to easily remember our beliefs and way of life as followers of Jesus.
2. “Know the Lord. Love the Lord. Serve the Lord out of love. And therein find your happiness and fulfillment in this world and in the next. Then help others who are still seeking to do the same.” Reflect on this concluding challenge. What action step(s) will you take to put what you’ve read in this document into practice in order to more faithfully follow Jesus in His Holy Catholic Church? Make a commitment and stick to it.

Catholic Terms Glossary

Ascension: From Latin *for to lift or go up*. Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus was taken up into Heaven. P. 19

Anointing of the Sick: The Sacrament which can bring healing, forgiveness of sins, and the strength to walk with Jesus under the weight of suffering. This sacrament brings the hand of God to heal us, or the passionate presence of Jesus to suffer with us. P. 29

Assumption: At the moment of her death, Mary didn't lie in a grave, while her body corrupted. Rather, she was taken up body and soul into the glory of Heaven. P. 8

Baptism: The Sacrament which takes away original sin and any other sins for which we are guilty and makes us adopted children of God as well as the brothers and sisters of all in the family of God. P. 27

Catholic: From the Greek, meaning *universal*. It is used as the proper name of the Church (when spelled in upper-case) and as an attribute of the Church, that it's universal (when spelled in lower-case). P. 3

Christ: A title for Jesus. Christ is from Greek, a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah, which means the one anointed with oil. P. 1

Christians: Followers of Jesus, who is known as the Christ. P. 1

Church (with an upper-case C): The assembly of people who belong to the Lord by their profession of faith and by being baptized. P. 2

church (with a lower-case c): The building where the assembly of believers go for prayer, either alone or with others, and where they gather together for worship at Holy Mass. P. 3

Confession: See Penance

Confirmation: The Sacrament which strengthens the gifts of the Holy Spirit received at Baptism, especially for the purpose of continuing the mission of Jesus in the ministries of the Church. P. 27

Deposit of Faith: What we learn about Jesus from both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. P. 5

Disciple: From the Latin for *one who* learns, it refers to one who follows Jesus and learns from his teaching and example about how to live in this world, in hope of eternal life in Heaven. P. 2

Eucharist: The Sacrament of spiritual food that nourishes our life in Christ. Receiving the Eucharist is the most intimate union we can have with God this side of Heaven. It also deepens the bond of spiritual friendship with the others who receive it. P. 28

Heaven: An eternal state of sublime bliss derived from the quieting of our desires, because they are all satisfied by our perfect union with God. P. 14

Hell: The eternal punishment for unrepentant mortal sin. The opposite of Heaven: no bliss, because our desiring is not quieted, because instead of union with God, there is eternal separation from God. P. 14

Holy Matrimony/Marriage: The Sacrament in which a baptized man and a baptized woman enter when they freely intend to stay together until death, to be faithful to each other, willing to welcome children, and say “I do” in the presence of a clergyman and two witnesses. P. 29

Holy Orders: The Sacrament in which a baptized man is ordained a deacon, priest, or bishop to preach, celebrate sacraments, and to exercise servant leadership in the Church. P. 30

Holy Trinity: The three Divine Persons in the one Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. P. 6

Immaculate Conception: God prepared Mary for her role as the mother of the sinless savior by preserving her from original sin at her conception. P. 7

Incarnation: A mystery of the faith which means *to be made flesh*. It refers to the Son of God receiving a human nature like ours. Jesus became man. P. 6

Judgement Day: Also known as the Day of the Lord, it is the day when Jesus will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. P. 21

Lectio Divina: A prayerful reading of the Bible. P. 4 & 24

Magisterium: The teaching authority of the Pope and the bishops in union with him, under the guidance of the Spirit. It has the final word when it comes to what we believe and how we live our Catholic Faith. P. 4

Marriage: See Holy Matrimony

Miracle: Something that can't be explained by the laws of nature. P. 10

Mortal Sin: A sin in which the bad thing that's actually done, or the good thing that's not done, is serious in and of itself, and we're fully aware of that fact, and our choice to sin is fully ours, fully free. The word mortal is from Latin, meaning deadly; it is said to kill the life of Christ (grace) that we receive at Baptism. P. 33

Mother of Christians: A title of honor given to Mary at the foot of the cross. Mary is regarded as the spiritual mother of the Church. P. 8

New Testament: The second part of the Bible which has 27 books that tell the story of Jesus, and the faith of his first followers. P. 3

Old Testament: The first part of the Bible which has 46 books of the history, law, and prophecies of the Jewish religion. P. 3

Penance/Confession: The Sacrament in which our sins are forgiven when we are sorry, confess to a priest, and the priest says "I absolve you of your sins." P. 28

Pentecost: From the Greek for *fiftieth*. Celebrates the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the Jewish religion, fifty days after Passover is the Feast of Weeks (a harvest festival). The first Christians were celebrating this feast when the Holy Spirit came upon them. P. 20

Perpetual Virginity of Mary: Mary and her husband Joseph renounced sexual intimacy, even though they were married. P. 8

Prayer: Lifting up our minds and hearts to God, to express love, sorrow for sin, gratitude, or need. Prayer is also described as a dialogue with God. P. 24

Purgatory: From the Latin meaning *to purge, or purify*. The final purification that people who die in God's good graces may need to undergo before entering Heaven. P. 15

Redemption: From the Latin meaning *to pay off a debt*. Jesus' death satisfied the debt of sin, and so saves us from Hell for Heaven. P. 18

Resurrection: From the Latin meaning *to rise again*. On the third day after his death, the first Easter Sunday, Jesus rose again. P. 19

Sacraments: Outward signs (like water, or oil) started by Jesus to give us grace, a share in the very life of God, putting us in relationship to God and other believers. P. 27

Sacred Scripture: The collection of the 73 books of the Bible written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to record without error those things needed for our salvation. P. 3

Sacred Tradition: From the Latin meaning *to pass something down*. Refers to what we learn about Jesus that was not written down, but handed down orally from Jesus to his Apostles, and by them to their successors, the bishops of the Catholic Church. We believe that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, just like Scripture, and that it has the same authority as Scripture. P. 4-5

Sin: When we think, speak, or act in a way that is contrary to the law of God, especially the Ten Commandments, and even more the commandments to love God first and most, and to love your neighbor as yourself. P. 32

Tradition (with an upper-case T): An authoritative source of teaching, revealed by God and affirmed by the Church, which we have access to especially in Church doctrine, worship, and faith practices. P. 5

tradition (with a lower-case t): Prayers, or devotions, or stories associated with the saints that might be inspired by the Spirit, but not necessarily, and they are not authoritative for what we believe and how we live as Christians. P. 5

Venial Sin: A sin in which the bad thing that's actually done (a sin of commission), or the good thing that's not done (a sin of omission) is not so serious in and of itself, or when there were unavoidable limits to our knowledge or freedom. The word venial is from the Latin for *pardonable*. P. 33

Virginal Conception: Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. P. 7

