

What does it mean to be Catholic? This could be the subject of many discussions, but for the Pastor's Notes today, let's just concern ourselves with the question of what a *practicing Catholic* is. The Church has established for us a clear list of certain precepts to be followed for one to be considered a practicing Catholic. In the Catechism, they are listed as the "Precepts of the Church," from paragraphs 2041 to 2043. They can be abbreviated by saying:

1. You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligations and rest from servile labor.
2. You shall confess your sins at least once a year.
3. You shall receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist at least once during the Easter season.
4. You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.
5. You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.

There also was traditionally a sixth precept, that stated:

6. You shall obey the marriage laws of the Church.

Quoting directly from the Catechism:

"§2041 The precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor:"

By following these precepts, or commandments, one has the right to call himself a practicing Catholic. Below is the full text from the Catechism for the first three precepts:

"§2042 The first precept ('You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor') requires the faithful to sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord as well as the principal liturgical feasts honoring the mysteries of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints; in the first place, by participating in the Eucharistic celebration, in which the Christian community is gathered, and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days.

"The second precept ('You shall confess your sins at least once a year') ensures preparation for the Eucharist by the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, which continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness.

"The third precept ('You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season') guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy."

This paragraph contains the first three precepts, and they are joined together by the common thread of Eucharistic Communion. Note that participation in the Mass by attendance does not necessarily mean reception of Holy Communion. Even those who are not able to receive Holy Communion because they haven't fasted beforehand, or because they are in a state of mortal sin, or because they are in an irregular marriage—are still obliged to attend the Holy Sacrifice on Sundays and to observe the Sunday rest from servile labor. I would also further note that the second and third precept go together, that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the normal preparation for the reception of Holy Communion. Perhaps in years past there was too much emphasis placed on confession of venial sins, so that people refrained from Holy Communion and received too infrequently. These days, we have the opposite issue of a heavy emphasis on frequent reception of Holy Communion without the corresponding frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Obviously, the minimum is going to confession once a year. But each person will have to discern in his own heart, and on the level of his conscience, whether or not that is sufficient for the frequency with which they receive the Holy Eucharist. One of the benefits of receiving at the altar rail is that we are not as "on the spot" or "feel obliged" to receive Holy Communion when we may not be prepared in our own hearts.

As we celebrate this weekend our patronal feast day of the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, it is good for us to be reminded of these precepts, and for us to take up again the call to be **practicing Catholics**, not just Catholics in name only. What a joy it has been to celebrate the Forty Hours Devotion before our Eucharistic Lord! I hope that many took advantage of the extra opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Friday and that our newly confirmed parish members might be renewed in their Baptismal promises and live the fullness of the Catholic faith. I particularly want to thank Fr. Jeff Kirby for his preaching and teaching during the Forty Hours, and most especially, Bishop Stika, for his pastoral guidance of our diocese, and by honoring us with his presence at our patronal feast day Mass.

*Rev. J. David Carter*