

## **OUR FAITH AND LIFE AS CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS**

- **There is one true God, creator of all things.** We know even from our own reasoning, before faith, that all things that do not have being as part of their nature must *receive* being from something else as First Cause. There must exist an original Being, who has being belonging to his very nature, and so does not need to receive being from anything else: existence belongs to his very self, so he always exists, eternally. God is *unlimited Being*, giving to all the things that he creates a *limited share* in being. As unlimited Being, he is a Spirit, infinite in all perfections – such as goodness, love, justice, mercy, knowledge, happiness, freedom and power. We give our lives to him in praise, thanksgiving, adoration, faith, trust and love.
- Jesus revealed to us the mystery of **the Trinity: in this one God there are from all eternity three equal persons** – the Father, the Son being ‘born’ from the Father as his perfect Word, his perfect self-expression, and the Holy Spirit, proceeding from Father and Son as the expression of their infinite mutual love. God is Mystery, beyond all our understanding.
- **God, the Holy Trinity, out of love, freely created all things as good.** God does not create evil. He only allows it to happen because from the evil he can bring forth, in the end, even greater goods. This is often in ways we cannot yet see – maybe until heaven – so he calls us to trust in him. Much evil comes from the free choices of the intelligent beings God created – human beings and angels (pure spirits, some of whom turned against God and became demons).
- **God created human beings in his own image.** Catholics may believe that the human *body* was gradually created by a process of evolution over millions of years. However, the immortal spiritual *soul* of each person can only be directly created by God. Human beings are made in God’s image, and we have free will, the ability to choose good or evil.
- **The first humans, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God at the tempting of the Devil** (Satan, the chief demon). They lost, for themselves and their descendants, the special gifts God had given, of even *bodily* immortality and sanctifying grace (the share in God’s own life given to our souls – the seed of eternal happiness with God in heaven). This is ‘original sin’.
- In God’s plan to save humanity from sin, death and hell, **God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, became human as Jesus Christ 2000 years ago.** While remaining fully God, he also took to himself a complete human nature, being born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is one divine person with two natures: fully God and fully man.
- Having taught us the way of salvation, **Jesus freely offered his life, accepting death by crucifixion to make up for all the sins of humanity.** It was truly one of humanity who suffered, but because he was also God, his offering had unlimited divine value.
- **The third day from his death, Jesus rose to new life – the first Easter.** His disciples were the witnesses that he was alive, seeing him and speaking with him over forty days. They spent their lives giving witness to what they had seen, even though this brought great suffering and even death – proving they were not liars. (Other undeniable miracles from history such as at Fatima, Lourdes and Lanciano, also show God’s ‘stamp of approval’ on Catholic teachings.)
- **Jesus ascended into heaven forty days from his death,** and ten days later, **at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples,** into their hearts and souls, giving them unity, power and courage – God’s People, the Church, fully comes to birth.

- God's plan is to save us not just as isolated individuals, but as a united People – **the Church, the 'Body of Christ'**. This is the normal way of salvation (although those outside the Church through no fault of their own can still be saved and go to heaven, but with more difficulty.)
- **Jesus started the Catholic Church led by St Peter, the first Pope, head of the Twelve Apostles, the first Bishops.** 'You are Peter (Rock), and upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.' (Matthew 16:18) Peter went to Rome, was its Bishop, and was martyred there; ever since, the Bishops of Rome, the Popes, have led the one true Church of Christ.
- Jesus promised his disciples the Holy Spirit of Truth would be with them for ever, to guide them into all truth. (John 14:16-17; 14:26; 16:13) So to remain in the unity of God's People and on the path of salvation, **we must believe all the infallible teachings of the Catholic Church, as coming from God.** Without the Catholic Church, no one can know which books should even be part of the Bible (God's Word), and we could not be united in the true interpretation of the Bible.
- **The Church is one, holy, catholic** (universal – meant for all people) **and apostolic** (coming from the Apostles, and keeping all the teachings and sacraments they handed on). Even though the Church, the perfect Bride of Christ, is holy, we her members (popes, bishops, priests, deacons; religious (such as nuns, sisters and brothers); laypeople), with our free will, still commit sin. But this is not the fault of the Bride of Christ whom he made spotless: this is *our failure to be* fully Catholic: we prevent her full holiness from shining, because we do not live from her grace and truth.
- **The Church learns her teachings from the Word of God** – not the Bible alone, but both **the written word – the Bible**; and **the unwritten word – the Tradition** handed down from the Apostles. In the Bible (Scripture), God is the primary author, speaking through the human authors, so whatever they intend to claim as truth, is the truth. With the help of the Church, we have to carefully interpret when they are speaking literally or just symbolically (such as the six days of creation): only when we understand their true meaning do we know what they are claiming as truth. The most important books in the Bible are the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), which tell us the literal truth about the life of Jesus.
- **Mary, mother of Jesus**, because she gave birth to God the Son in his human nature, **is truly Mother of God, ever a virgin.** She is the perfect member of the Church, totally without sin – even original sin (this is what is meant by her Immaculate Conception). At the end of her life she was assumed body and soul into heaven, where she cares for us as our heavenly mother. We must not worship her as God, but we do give her great honour, and ask her to pray for us to Jesus her Son for all our needs, for example in the 'Hail Mary' (and the Rosary – 50 Hail Mary's). **All the other saints and the good angels, we also honour and pray for their help.**
- **After death, we face God's judgement in our immortal souls.** If we die united to Christ (having received his grace into our souls and preserved that grace, keeping faith, hope and charity (love) to the end), then we go to heaven, either **through the purification of purgatory (if we are not yet perfect) or immediately.** If we have committed mortal sin (deliberate serious sin, which destroys grace and charity) and refused to repent and gain God's forgiveness, we condemn *ourselves* to hell by freely refusing God's unchanging love.
- **Heaven is eternal happiness**, union with God's infinite goodness. The greater our holiness and love when we die, the greater our degree of happiness in heaven. **Hell is eternal punishment**, realising we have missed heaven forever through our own fault. Since we do not

know when death may take us suddenly, we must live always ready to face judgment – never committing mortal sin (or should that unfortunately happen, gaining God’s forgiveness as soon as possible). Prayers for the dead are especially to free souls still suffering in purgatory.

- **Christ will come again at the end of time** on an unknown day, judging the human race as a whole. Our bodies will rise again to share the destiny of our souls, and those in heaven will experience the fullness of God’s final kingdom.
- **Jesus gave us the Mass and the Seven Sacraments to guide us to heaven.** The Sacraments always give sanctifying grace to someone who receives them worthily. They are: 1. Baptism, 2. Confirmation, 3. the Eucharist (Holy Communion), 4. Reconciliation (Confession), 5. Anointing of the Sick, 6. Holy Orders (conferral of Priesthood) and 7. Matrimony.
- **Baptism** gives us birth into grace and divine life by uniting us with Christ, forgiving our sins and making us members of his Body, the Church. **Confirmation** gives us the full gift of the Holy Spirit, strengthening us to share our faith with other people. The **Eucharist**, the greatest Sacrament, is Jesus himself present among us under the appearances of bread and wine, to be our spiritual nourishment. **Reconciliation** gives us God’s forgiveness for sins committed after Baptism, especially mortal sins that have destroyed God’s grace and cut us off from heaven. **Anointing of the Sick** helps heal the effects of sin for the sick or elderly in some way approaching death (it is very good for a dying person to have a priest give them the sacraments). **Holy Orders** makes a man a Bishop, Priest or Deacon to serve God’s People (the most important reason for priests is to offer the Mass and bring about Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist). **Matrimony** raises marriage to a new level, giving special graces.
- **The Mass is the Sacrifice of the Cross made present.** It is the centre of Catholic life – the greatest way to praise, thank and worship God, and to ask his help. Catholics must go to Mass every Sunday. **In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, God and man, becomes really present under the appearances of bread and wine**, to give himself to us as spiritual food in Holy Communion. This happens when the priest during the Mass speaks the words of consecration spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper the night before he died: **‘This is my Body...This is the chalice of my Blood.’**
- **Sanctifying grace is the ‘seed’ of life in heaven**, planted in our souls by the Holy Spirit. First given to Adam and Eve, grace was lost for all of us by their rebellion. Jesus regained grace for us by his Death and Resurrection, and now we receive it especially through his Sacraments. Baptism first gives grace, the Eucharist strengthens it, Reconciliation restores it if it is lost by mortal sin. We must die with God’s grace in our souls to enter heaven.
- **With sanctifying grace, we always receive the gifts of faith, hope and charity (love).** By faith we believe in God, by hope we trust in him to lead us to heaven, by love, we love him above all things because of his infinite goodness, and love our neighbour as ourselves (since we are all created in God’s image).
- Faith means believing in God and all he has spoken to the human race, not because we have worked these things out for ourselves, but simply because he has said it and his word is true. Reasons can point the way, but **faith steps beyond reason, choosing to believe with total certainty all that God guarantees to us through Christ and through his Catholic Church.**
- The Beatitudes show us the fullness of love. The Commandments (Law) show us the lower limit, below which we commit sin.

- **To *deliberately and knowingly* break God's law in a *serious* matter is mortal sin, which destroys grace and charity, and so leads to hell.** A less serious sin, or one which is not fully deliberate or without full knowledge is called a venial sin.
- **Mortal sin is forgiven by Baptism (along with repentance (contrition)), or (after Baptism) by repentantly confessing the sin to a priest in Reconciliation.** If contrition is motivated by love for God above all things, whom we have offended, it is called 'perfect contrition'. It obtains forgiveness of sins even before Baptism or Reconciliation, as long as we intend to receive them when we have the opportunity. If contrition is motivated by fear of punishment in hell, or by the ugliness of sin, it is 'imperfect contrition'. By itself it does not obtain forgiveness of mortal sin, but combined with Baptism or Reconciliation it is enough.
- **The Ten Commandments summarise God's Law**, and we group various moral teachings under these headings. All mortal sins committed after Baptism must be confessed in Reconciliation (though forgotten sins are also forgiven). It is recommended, though not obligatory, to also confess venial sins. The more common sins which are mortal (when committed deliberately and with full knowledge of their seriousness) are as follows (*some venial sins against various commandments are in italics*):

- **1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.**

Deliberately denying or doubting a teaching of faith; despair of salvation; involvement in false worship, superstition or the occult; receiving Communion in a state of mortal sin; deliberately withholding a mortal sin in Confession.  
(*Irregularity and laziness in prayer.*)

- **2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.**

Blasphemy; perjury; breaking vows.  
(*Using the names of God or Jesus disrespectfully.*)

- **3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment: Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.**

Missing Mass on a Sunday without grave reason. [Vigil Mass the evening before suffices.] The same applies to Holy Days of Obligation. (In Australia, these are Christmas, and the Assumption of Mary (August 15))  
(*As far as reasonably possible, we aim to keep Sundays and Holy Days as days of rest from ordinary work – dedicated to prayer, family and the refreshment of leisure.*)

- **4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Honour your father and your mother.**

Serious violation of family duties.  
(*Less serious violations of family love, care, respect and peace – of children to parents, parents to children, spouses to each other, siblings to each other; disobedience to parents of children still living at home.*)  
[Under this commandment are also matters to do with obedience to teachers, the State, the Church.]

- **5<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not kill.**

Murder; suicide or attempted suicide; euthanasia; abortion; directly intended sterilisation; drug abuse; total drunkenness; hatred; leading another into serious sin.

*(Low-level violence (e.g. children hitting each other); unjustified or uncontrolled anger; verbal abuse; refusal to forgive; bearing grudges; bad example; immoderate use of food or alcohol; poor care of one's health.)*

- **6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not commit adultery.**

Adultery; fornication; homosexual acts; masturbation; pornography; contraception (natural family planning can be legitimate); IVF; remarriage after divorce.

- **7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not steal.**

Stealing (unless the amount is quite small, in which case the sin is venial); other serious injustice, or dishonesty with money or property.

*(Small violations of justice, property.)*

[Grouped under this commandment are also matters concerning duties of employers and workers to each other; paying taxes; unjust discrimination; helping the poor and needy; due care for the environment; excessive gambling; diligent use of time and talents.]

- **8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.**

Seriously damaging another's reputation either by lying, or by unnecessary disclosing of secret faults. Lies or violations of secrets that cause significant harm.

*(Lies / gossip / judging others unjustly – in less serious matters; sins of pride.)*

- **9<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.**

Deliberate lustful thoughts and desires concerning actions against the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

- **10<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.**

Enviously wishing someone to be deprived of substantial goods. Centring one's life on money, not God.

*(Lesser sins of greed and envy.)*

- **Personal prayer** is a necessary part of Christian life – speaking with God (in set words or our own words): praising and thanking him, pouring out our hearts to him, trustingly asking his help in all our needs. **The 'Our Father' is the great model of prayer Jesus himself gave us.**
- **Catholic life should include: daily personal prayer; Mass at least on Sundays** (going more often is not obligatory, but brings great blessings); and **regular Confession**, at least yearly, maybe every few months, monthly is best. We do **penance** (acts of self-denial offered to God), especially in the season of Lent leading to Easter, and on every Friday; on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday we fast, and abstain from meat. Of course we keep the **Commandments**, but beyond this, we always seek to do **loving actions**.