

## Blue Bucket Questions:

Through 01/01/24

**Q: One of our relatives is challenging one of our kids with atheistic and purportedly scientifically based questions. He just recommended this podcast to her... The origins podcast with Lawrence Krauss <https://podcasts.apple.com...> My husband wonders if there is a similarly scientifically/theologically based podcast with a Catholic worldview? He hopes to recommend some listening for this relative and to our daughter.**

**A:** A great podcast would be, *The Purposeful Lab* podcast that you can find on a variety of platforms (e.g., YouTube, Apple Podcasts, etc...). You can get quick access to it here on the Magiscenter website => <https://www.magiscenter.com/purposeful-lab> .

Another great short video series for your relative or daughter would be the Word on Fire, *Wonder: The Harmony of Faith and Science* series on YouTube. You can find the current episodes on YouTube here at the Word on Fire homepage => <https://www.youtube.com/wordonfirevideo2> .

The Magiscenter website itself (<https://www.magiscenter.com/>) is a great resource. It is full of great references (articles, short and long form videos, etc...) that are designed for teens and adults with the misperception that there is a conflict between faith and science.

Now for some fun... Let's start with some facts / quotes to warm up...

- The Nobel Prize winners in the hard sciences (Chemistry, Physics, Medicine) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century break down as follows as far as religious belief is concerned: 68% Christian, 20% Jewish, 1% Muslim, 11% Atheists/Agnostic. Believers in the One True God 89% - Atheists/Agnostics 11%. Winner = God.
- “The First swallow from the cup of the natural sciences makes atheists – but at the bottom of the cup God is waiting.” Nobel Prize Winning Nuclear Physicist Werner Heisenberg.
- In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the percentage of hard scientists that believe in God increases annually (the increase is dramatic for scientists under the age of 45) from its 20<sup>th</sup> century dominant position as more and more are coming to the conclusion that our universe shows the clear “fingerprints” of an intelligent designer (for more on this have your daughter / relative watch this brief (~6 minutes) video => <https://youtu.be/EE76nwimuT0?si=CSMRVjVzh1GthVei> ).
- “Evolution, as a mechanism, can be and must be true. But that says nothing about the nature of its author. For those who believe in God, there are reasons now to be more in awe, not less.” Francis Collins, Lead Scientist - the Human Genome Project
- The Fathers of Modern Philosophy (from which physical sciences evolved) – St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Rene Descartes – were all devote Catholics.
- Science Historians credit medieval Catholic mathematicians and philosophers such as John Buridan, Nicole Oresme, and Roger Bacon as the founders of modern science.

- Some notable Catholic scientists - Father Nicolas Copernicus (Heliocentricity), Father Gregor Mendel (Modern Genetics), Father George Lemaitre (The Big Bang Theory), Henri Becquerel (Radioactivity), St. Giuseppe Moscati (Insulin), Blaise Pascal (Calculator, Probability Theory), Louis Pasteur (Pasteurization), Fr. Giuseppe Mercalli (Volcanism), etc...
- “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth – in a word, to know himself – so that by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.” Fides et Ratio (Faith & Reason), Pope Saint John Paul II, 1998.
- “Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth...The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God ...” (The [Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC 159](#))

Then let’s move on to a quick argument for the self-defeating logic of Atheism... Atheists will argue:

- Premise 1: Everything in the universe is material
- Premise 2: Material is reducible to physics and chemistry in unguided and random subatomic interactions
- Premise 3: Human behaviors and thoughts are generated in the brain which is material
- *Conclusion: Therefore, human behaviors and thoughts are unguided and random*

The problem with this syllogism is that if we follow this logic then all our beliefs and actions are not our own nor are they intelligent. How do we then trust or stand on beliefs that the argument shows are untrustworthy? At the same time the argument states that we do what we do out of simple reaction to the random firing of neurons in our brains. If this is true then we cannot condemn or prosecute anyone for any crime, because they couldn’t really do otherwise or help themselves. Of course, no one really believes this and when this fundamental flaw in the atheist argument is pointed out most self-proclaimed atheists will have no response.

Finally, If your relative (and/or daughter) is willing, I have a few good books for them to read. Some require a bit of actual scientific knowledge to fully understand, but if one reads them and is intellectually honest, one will have a tough time holding on to any form of materialism / scientism / atheism.

1. Spitzer, Robert S.J., Ph.D.; *Science At Doorstep to God: Science and Reason in Support of God, the Soul, and Life After Death*; San Francisco, CA; Ignatius Press; 2023
2. Barr, Stephen M.; *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith*; Notre Dame, IN; University of Notre Dame Press; 2003

3. Trasancos, Stacy A, Ph.D.; *Particles of Faith: A Catholic Guide to Navigating Science*; Notre Dame, IN; Ave Maria Press; 2016 **(NOTE: Your daughter might enjoy this one from the first woman to ever have her own lab at DuPont)**
4. Spitzer, Robert S.J., Ph.D.; *The Soul's Upward Yearning: Clues to Our Transcendent Nature From Experience and Reason*; San Francisco, CA; Ignatius Press; 2015
5. Gauger, Ann, Ph.D.; *God's Grandeur: The Catholic Case for Intelligent Design*; Manchester, NH; Sophia Institute Press; 2023
6. Wiker, Benjamin; *The Catholic Church & Science: Answering the Questions, Exposing the Myths*; Charlotte, NC; TAN Books; 2011 **(NOTE: Debunks a bunch of myths about Catholicism and Science)**
7. Verschuuren, Gerard Dr.; *How Science Points to God*; Manchester, NH; Sophia Institute Press; 2020

I know that is a lot. Sorry about that. However, this is a battle that all Catholics should be engaged in. The arguments in favor of the complimentary nature of faith and science so far outweigh the logically weak arguments of atheists that it is amazing they persist at all. Two works of literature are primarily responsible for promoting the myth of Faith and Science being in conflict in the western world: 1) William Draper's, *History of Conflict Between Religion and Science*, 1874 and 2) Dickson White's, *A History of the Warfare of Science With Theology in Christendom*, 1896. These "works" were created more than a century ago (Draper actually came out before the end of his life and refuted everything he had written), have been discredited by science historians and scientists alike, yet they are still referenced and quoted heavily by those who try to demonstrate that science disproves faith. The reality is that, "Atheists and Agnostics championed the 'conflict thesis' for their own purposes, but historical research gradually demonstrated that their sources (Draper and White books) had propagated more fantasy than fact in their efforts to prove that science and religion are locked in eternal conflict." (Science Historian James Hannam) It's time for us Catholics to start championing the truth!

**Q: How can I defend the Church against times when clergy members (such as the Pope) exercise secular powers as heads of state in negative ways, such as violently quelling rebellion, or over-taxing people? Is the way around this difficulty holding on to the fact that it doesn't involve infallibility?**

**A:** I would not try to, "...defend the Church against times when clergy members (such as the Pope) exercise secular powers as heads of state in negative ways, such as violently quelling rebellion, or over-taxing people." You need to keep in mind that, "The Church from its very beginning and at every point of its development, has been marked to varying degrees by sin, scandal, stupidity, misbehavior, misfortune, and wickedness." (Barron, Bishop Robert; *Letter to a Suffering Church*; Park Ridge, IL; Word on Fire; 2019; pg. 41) The history of the papacy, while full of saints is also littered with sinners and incompetence. If you would like to read more about that pickup Rod Bennett's book entitled, *Bad Shepherds*, or, for a more comprehensive view of papal history, you could consider Eamon Duffy's book, *Saints and Sinners*.

That said, when someone brings up one of the Church's missteps, I do start by trying to verify that what is being presented is historically accurate. While the Church and its leaders have done plenty wrong over the last 2,000 years, accusations are often made that are exaggerated or

simply false. Always start by looking to separate fact from fiction. More often than not, you will be dealing with fiction and no real issue to discuss.

If something is presented that is factually true (or even near true) there is no need to defend it and you should not feel compelled to try. The Church was never intended to be perfect – Christ did not promise that. Jesus himself established the Church by having a traitor (Judas), a denier (Peter – our First Pope), and a doubter (poor Thomas) represent 25% of his inner circle. The faults of the men that govern the Church have nothing to do with our desire to become disciples of Jesus Christ and the Church’s mission to foster that.

When confronted with anything that is reasonably correct that highlights one of the Church’s many failings, I always fall back on the words of G. K. Chesterton who said, “When people impute special vices to the Christian Church, they seem entirely to forget that the world has these vices much more. The Church has been cruel; but the world has been much crueler. The Church has plotted; but the world has plotted much more. The church has been superstitious; but it has never been so superstitious as the world is when left to itself.” G.K. Chesterton goes on to say that “The world will do all that it has ever accused the Church of doing and do it much worse, and do it on a much larger scale, and do it without any standards for a return to sanity or any motives for a movement to repentance.”

In other words, since the Church is populated with humans we should not be surprised when human failings arise within it. What should surprise us is that it happens so infrequently across 2,000 years of history and that it almost always serves as a source of renewal and reform. St. Paul tells us, “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” ([Romans 8:28](#)) We need to keep St. Paul’s words in our heart to recognize that God can turn even the Church’s worst moment into a victory for his kingdom in the long run.

We should not try to minimize or excuse the errors made by the Church or its leaders. Rather, we should acknowledge the truth (making sure it is indeed the truth and not a fabrication), point to the reforms those events led to and keep the words of Hilaire Belloc front and center. Belloc once said, “The Catholic Church is an institution I am bound to hold divine – but for the unbelievers a proof of its divinity might be found in the fact that no merely human institution conducted with such knavish imbecility would have lasted a fortnight.” The point being that the Church has survived despite its bad actors when all other institutions failed. There is only one explanation for this – The Holy Spirit continues to, “...guide (the Church) into all the truth...” ([John 16:13](#)). The Holy Spirit will ensure the Church does not mislead when teaching on faith and morals and will prevent the Church from failing in its mission. However, the Holy Spirit will not prevent all error or compromise the free will of Church leaders – good or bad.

**Q: I had a question about the requirements regarding the Christmas and Easter Octaves. I've heard, for example, that the Easter Octave extends Easter Sunday for a whole week and that each day is like a solemnity. But does that mean that the requirements of a holy day of obligation--no unnecessary work, etc., apply to each day? What about the Christmas Octave? Is it the same? Also, I think I read that the normal requirements of Friday penance don't apply to the Friday of the Easter Octave since it qualifies as a solemnity, but that the same doesn't apply to the Friday of the Christmas Octave**

**(although I may have encountered conflicting information on this). Could you please clarify what rules apply to each Octave?**

**A:** Your general understanding as presented in your question is relatively accurate. The first thing you should know is that there are not many “rules” that Latin Catholics must abide by relative to these two remaining Octaves. You can read a little bit about the origins and history of Octaves in our faith in [The Catholic Encyclopedia](#) in this [ARTICLE](#). You can also read a fair amount about the specifics of the Easter and Christmas Octaves (included what is and is not required and what is and is not allowed) on the Catholic Answers website [HERE](#) and [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). Also, please note there are some significant differences between the Easter and Christmas Octave that are discussed [HERE](#). Most prominent amongst those differences is that, “Interestingly, the Friday in the Christmas Octave is still considered a fasting Friday because Christmas (although liturgically celebrated as an Octave) is celebrated only as a one-day solemnity.” Finally, the days of the Easter Octave are “like” solemnities in that we celebrate them, but they are not Solemnities, and hence, not holy days of obligation.

Rather than repeat all the good information found in those articles I will leave you with them as sound references.

**Q: Why does the Feast of the Holy Innocents (today) occur before the Epiphany (Jan 6)?**

**A:** Let’s start by making sure you are clear on what the Feast of the Epiphany is celebrating as many Catholics mistakenly believe it is a commemoration of the adoration of the wise men only (I know I thought this for most of my life). The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) provides a great definition of the Epiphany in [CCC 528](#) which states:

*The Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (magi) from the East, together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee.*

The Feast of the Epiphany happens after the Feast of the Holy Innocents because it is focused on the mystery of the Lord's manifestation not merely the arrival of the Magi. If the feast of the Epiphany was solely focused on the Magi’s arrival we would expect it to precede the Feast of the Holy Innocents which honors the children killed by Herod in Bethlehem ([Matthew 2:16-18](#)) as he searched for Christ.

“The Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated on January 6th, is the great feast of faith where both those who have already arrived at faith and those who are on the way to arrive at it take part.” (see [THIS](#) homily from Pope Saint John Paul II, paragraph 7) It is a feast that celebrates the gift of faith and the challenge of bringing faith to others. You can read more about the history of the feast in [THIS ENTRY](#) from the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#). In addition, this brief [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers provides a nice overview.

**Q: Considering the controversy between the Catholicism and Homosexual relationships, is it bad for parents to respond to their kids coming out as homosexual by "disowning" or kicking their OWN kid out of their house? Does unconditional love apply in this case too?**

**A:** ABSOLUTELY! We all suffer from concupiscence and are attracted to different types of sin. If we were to disown all our children because of their sinful inclinations everyone would be an orphan. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) is very clear about how those suffering from same sex attraction are to be treated in CCC 2358 when it says, "The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They **must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity**. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition."

The section of the Catechism that runs from [CCC 2351-2359](#) discusses a variety of offenses against chastity. Homosexual acts are just one of several different misuses of our sexual powers that are listed. There is no hierarchy of offenses, and a married couple engaging in sodomy or a single person engaging in masturbation is no more or less sinful than a homosexual act. If we were to ostracize and or condemn everyone who commits an offense against chastity, there would be very few (if any) people left in our Church.

In addition, the Catechism teaches us that, "**A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift**. The 'supreme gift of marriage' is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged 'right to a child' would lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right 'to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents,' and '**the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception**.'" ([CCC 2378](#)) We are also told that, "**Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons**. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law." ([CCC 2222](#))

To disown a child because they have sinful inclinations and / or sin would itself be a gravely sinful act. Our life on earth is designed as an "apprenticeship" where we are to master love. Our model is God himself who loves each of us unconditionally. We are to do the same (learn to love unconditionally) and the family provides an excellent environment to practice this skill starting with our children. The response to any sinful inclinations / behavior that our children share with us should be the same. We should acknowledge the sinful act (NOTE: Same Sex attraction in and of itself is not a sin, engaging in sexual activities outside of the bonds of a sacramental marriage is.), share the teachings of the Church regarding the action, and accompany our children in their battle to overcome their sinful desires recognizing that we ALL struggle with some form of sin that we need God's grace to overcome.

The first thing a parent of a same sex attracted child should do is to seek support for both them and their children. Courage (<https://couragec.org/>) is a Catholic apostolate that supports those with same sex attraction and EnCourage (<https://couragec.org/encourage/>) is a offshoot organization that is dedicated to the spiritual needs of parents, siblings, children, and other relatives and friends of persons who have same-sex attractions. Both groups are great places to start to access resources to help in this battle and connect with a community of Catholics working through similar struggles.

**Q: What is the Church's thoughts on how it is portrayed in various types of media? Be it movies, books, music, art, etc.**

**A:** The Church is not overly concerned with how it is portrayed in media – positively or negatively. The Church is focused on saving souls and, unless a misrepresentation in media impacts that

mission, the Church will have no official reaction to any media portrayal. Like all organizations, the Church simply asks that it be portrayed accurately and fairly. Unfortunately, very few members of the mainstream media are qualified to understand (much less interpret) Church teaching and guidance and hence misrepresentations are common. The good news is that there is outstanding Catholic Media (e.g., National Catholic Register, The Pillar, etc...) which is quite capable of providing objective reporting on Church activities. Often, mainstream media will correct itself by referencing one of these sources.

Jesus was very clear in John 15:20 when he said, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you..." The Church expects to be misrepresented and attacked by the media. The good news is that there is a growing list of Catholic Apostolates that are effectively working to ensure that the media portrayal is accurate and, when it is not, ensuring that a correction is made.

**Q: My grandfather is very close to death and I know that he rejects the Faith. Other members of the family do too. He used to profess it, but due to hardships in his childhood, he turned from it. I told my grandmother that he probably shouldn't have a Catholic funeral then since he rejected the Faith, and she understood. Even though he used to be Catholic, was this the right thing to say? Is there something in Canon Law that permits such a funeral for someone in his state? Also, since it was decently well known in the family that he rejected the Faith, if there is a secular funeral service for him, is it licit to attend?**

**A:** Whether or not an individual is a practicing Catholic at the time of death is not the determinative factor when considering if one is eligible to receive an ecclesiastical funeral in a Catholic Church. [The Code Canon Law](#) informs us in [Canon 1176](#) that:

*"§1. Deceased members of the Christian faithful must be given ecclesiastical funerals according to the norm of law.*

*§2. Ecclesiastical funerals, by which the Church seeks spiritual support for the deceased, honors their bodies, and at the same time brings the solace of hope to the living, must be celebrated according to the norm of the liturgical laws.*

*§3. The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed; nevertheless, the Church does not prohibit cremation unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine."*

Meanwhile, [Canon 1184](#) informs us that:

*§1. Unless they gave some signs of repentance before death, the following must be deprived of ecclesiastical funerals:*

- 1. notorious apostates, heretics, and schismatics;*
- 2. those who chose the cremation of their bodies for reasons contrary to Christian faith;*
- 3. other manifest sinners who cannot be granted ecclesiastical funerals without public scandal of the faithful.*

*§2. If any doubt occurs, the local ordinary is to be consulted, and his judgment must be followed.*

I assume that your grandfather was at least baptized Catholic. It seems likely that he may have been confirmed and received his First Communion as well. It also seems unlikely that he is a, "...notorious apostate, heretic, or schismatic." With this in mind, unless he issued specific

instructions to the contrary, he should have a Catholic funeral as he is Catholic whether he acknowledges that fact or not.

Since he is still alive the best thing you could do is to ask him if he would be willing to have a funeral in a Catholic Church. While you are at it you should ask him if he would be open to receiving the anointing of the sick. This could end up being a great comfort for him as he ends his life. How your grandfather responds to these two requests could go a long way to determining how to proceed. You may be surprised by what he says as I recently went through a similar situation on to find that my fallen away mother-in-law not only embraced the anointing, but was open to a Catholic funeral.

As far as attending a secular memorial service for your grandfather, the Catholic Church recognizes the importance of honoring and remembering the deceased, and it is not explicitly forbidden to attend a secular memorial service. However, it is important to approach such situations with prudence and discernment, considering the specific circumstances and the potential impact on one's own faith and the faith of others. It is recommended to consult with a priest or spiritual advisor as they can provide pastoral guidance based on the teachings of the Church and the specific circumstances involved. The same approach could help determine if pursuing an ecclesiastical funeral would be the best path forward in considering your grandfather's history and (if lucky enough to get them) stated desires.

**Q: Is there a guide about fasting for Catholics? I mean outside of Lent fasting. I know there is 1 hour before receiving communion fasting too, I heard it used to be 12 hours though. Is there also a comparison guide to how the fasting requirements used to be compared to today's standards?**

**A:** If you are looking for the current requirements regarding fasting / abstinence in the United States you can find it [HERE](#) at the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) site. The U.S. requirements (every Bishops conference is able to establish rules specific to their jurisdiction and individual Bishops are empowered to modify those rules for their diocese) have not changed substantially in over 50 years. If you are looking for a bit of historical information you cannot go wrong with the Catholic Encyclopedia entry which describes many of the historical practices [HERE](#) and [HERE](#) which can then be compared to the current U.S. requirements to see what has changed.

You may also want to reference the following sections of the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) to get a little more insight into fasting as a form of penance (CCC [1434](#), [1438](#), [2043](#)) and fasting in preparation for reception of Holy Communion at Mass (CCC [1387](#)).

**Q: What do you know about Saint Gertrude chaplet? Can it really release 50,000 souls from purgatory?**

**A:** St. Gertrude the Great was a Benedictine nun and mystic who lived in the 13th century. According to tradition, St. Gertrude had a vision where our Lord promised her that 1,000 souls would be released from Purgatory each time a specific prayer that was revealed to her is prayed. When praying the "St. Gertrude chaplet" this prayer is said 50 times and hence one could assume that 50,000 souls are released. However, there are a few things to keep in mind:



1. St. Gertrude's visions are private revelations given to her for a specific purpose. The Church has generally reviewed her visionary material and stated it is worthy of belief as it does not conflict with the Catholic faith. However, this does not mean that the Catholic Church endorses any specific vision or promises that a visionary received.
2. Catholics are free to believe in private revelations that have been deemed worthy of belief but are not required to do so. I could not find any reference to the Church stating that the St. Gertrude prayer and its associated promises are worthy of belief.
3. St. Gertrude's vision could be taken literally. Yet, there is no guarantee that the "1,000 souls" was an allegorical or literal number. Visionaries will tell you that what they see and hear is not necessarily open for literal interpretation and that even they will struggle determining what a specific vision means.
4. To assume that a literal 1,000 souls would be freed from purgatory every time a single prayer was prayed is bordering on superstition. All prayers offered in good faith for the souls in purgatory will have an effect. To count on exactly 1,000 souls having their purgation completed each time the prayer is prayed is not something the Church would ever endorse. It could happen, but it is not part of official Church teaching.

The bottom line is you need to be careful about putting too much weight on private revelations as they are primarily a gift for the visionary and, at best, the Church would only say they are worthy of belief.

## Through 12/18

**Q: Latin v. Tridentine and high/low mass....I'm looking to get a clear distinction on the following please: 1) Is the Tridentine and Latin mass one and the same? 2) Are the high and low mass forms associated with both/how do they fit in? 3) Is it possible to have an ordinary mass with elements of the Latin/Tridentine mass? If so, how would you categorize it? Example: a vernacular-based mass with Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei in Latin, priest occasionally facing the same direction as the congregation during the liturgy of the Eucharist.**

**A:** The Tridentine Mass is the Latin Rite of the Mass that was promulgated after the council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is also known as (A.K.A.) the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM), the Mass of 1962 (the last time it was revised by John XXIII) and the Extraordinary Form. The term "Latin Mass" can be confusing as there is a preference for Latin even in the Novus Ordo A.K.A. the Mass of Paul VI, the Mass of Vatican II, The New Mass, and the Ordinary Form. You can participate in a Novus Ordo Mass that is prayed primarily in Latin, with the Priest Ad Orientum (vs. Versus Populum – facing the people) with Gregorian Chant and with only the readings and homily in the vernacular language (e.g., English). This would be the way that the Fathers of Vatican II envisioned it when they released [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#) outlining the suggested changes to the Liturgy and rationale for them. Many people mistakenly believe they are experiencing the Tridentine Mass when they encounter the Novus Ordo celebrated in this fashion.

The Novus Ordo, the current form of the Roman Catholic Mass, does not have a distinction between high Mass and low Mass. The distinction between high Mass and low Mass is specific to the TLM. In the Novus Ordo, the Mass can be celebrated in different ways depending on the occasion, but there is no specific categorization of high Mass or low Mass.

In the TLM The high Mass and low Mass are two different forms of the Catholic Mass. The high Mass, also known as a Pontifical Mass or Solemn Mass, is sung by a bishop or a priest assisted by a deacon and sub-deacon (see [The Baltimore Catechism No. 3, 925](#)). It is the norm and includes elaborate ceremonies and rituals, such as the singing of the dismissal, a blessing by the celebrant, a prayer that God may be pleased with the sacrifice, and the reading of the Last Gospel (see the Catholic Encyclopedia – [Liturgy of the Mass](#)). The high Mass is typically celebrated in a consecrated or blessed church, at a consecrated altar, and at specific times during the day.

On the other hand, the low Mass is a shortened and simplified form of the high Mass. It is said by a priest alone with one server. In the low Mass, there is no singing, and the rituals and ceremonies are minimal. For example, the Gospel is read by the celebrant on the north side of the altar, and the celebrant always turns to the right. The low Mass can be celebrated in private oratories or even rooms under special circumstances.

**Q: I have two questions, my first one is embarrassing, but is oral sex permitted? Second on a crucifix how is Jesus suppose to be portrayed? I know Jesus must be facing to his left side, but is his right leg on top or the bottom? Also I a crucifix that doesn't have the INRI on it, is it still alright to have? Thank you for your time and have a blessed day.**

**A:** Nothing to be embarrassed about. Let's address them in order. I am assuming that when you ask, "Is oral sex permitted?", that you are talking about engaging in that act outside of a valid sacramental Marriage. In that case the simple answer is "No." [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "the deliberate use of the sexual faculty for any reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose." ([CCC 2352](#)) That said, in the case of a validly married couple the answer is a little nuanced. The Church teaches that, "...it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered per se to the procreation of human life." ([CCC 2366](#)) If within the bond of marriage oral sexual stimulation is used for the purpose leading into the consummation of the sexual act through full sexual union it is allowed. However, if it is used as an end to itself, it would not be open to life as the individual upon whom it is performed would be completing a sexual act that is not open to life. The entire section [CCC 2331-2391](#) would be worth a read for you as it covers this and many related topics in detail.

As for your second question there are no definitive rules for how a crucifix must be constructed and / or how the corpus on it must be positioned. As long as the depiction is respectful and aligned with Catholic teaching, artistic interpretation can come into play. There are rules governing the placement of a crucifix within a Church and those are outline within the General Instructions for the Roman Missal (GIRM).

**Q: Was the biblical story of the tower, the confusion of languages, and the scattering of people an actual historical event? If so, what good did it serve? Surely, the tower could not have even come close to the height of so many skyscrapers that we have today. And the confusion of languages and scattering of people has led to innumerable conflicts between peoples throughout the ages. After all,**

**people who don't speak the same language and who do not know each other tend to see each other as enemies rather than as friends. On the other hand, if the account was not an actual historical event, then why is it in the Bible?**

**A:** Let's start with an understanding of what the 73 books of the Bible are. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures." ([CCC 107](#)) However, we also learn that, "In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current. 'For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.'" ([CCC 110](#)) So, the Bible conveys fundamental truths using a variety of genres (allegory, history, biography, poetry, historical fiction, etc...) and contexts that are specific to the people for whom the books were originally written.

The Church consistently teaches that the early chapters of Genesis (usually delineated as the first 11 chapters) are written in symbolic language or allegory – see [CCC 337](#), [375](#), and [390](#). These early chapters of "pre-history" present fundamental truths about God and man's relationship to him but are not intended to convey specifics of historical events. The Catechism teaches us about the truths presented in the story of the Tower of Babel ([Genesis 11:1-9](#)) when it states, "This state of division into many nations is at once cosmic, social, and religious. It is intended to limit the pride of fallen humanity united only in its perverse ambition to forge its own unity as at Babel. But, because of sin, both polytheism and the idolatry of the nation and of its rulers constantly threaten this provisional economy with the perversion of paganism." In other words, God fostered division amongst early humanity as a means of contradicting man's pride and desire to be "his own God." It's man's sinfulness that creates the problems you identify as a result of this division.

The bottom line is that the Bible is not a history or science book. It is an inerrant book of fundamental truths that teach us about God and our relationship with him. While some of it is history (e.g., the Gospels, 1 & 2 Kings) other elements are not to be read as such (e.g., Genesis 1-11, Job, Judith, etc...).

**Q: I have had an interest in church history for many decades. In particular, I am fascinated by the beauty of the Greek Orthodox tradition. The magnificence of the ancient ritual and the deep faith of the faithful are truly inspiring. I have been to Mount Athos and visited the most beautiful church in the world, Aya Sofia. In addition, given that the New Testament was written in Koine Greek why can't the Vatican recognize the Orthodox orders.? Surely the patriarch of Constantinople deserves a special place of honor in the Christian world.**

**A:** The Catholic Church does recognize the validity of Orthodox Holy Orders and is clear that the Orthodox Church has maintained apostolic succession. As a result, the Catholic Church recognizes the validity of Orthodox sacraments. That said, when the Orthodox Churches made the definitive split from Catholicism in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, following a series of splits and

reunifications from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onward (and a series of theological disputes spanning the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries), it chose to deny communion with the one true Church and the primacy of the successor of Peter – the pope.

What led to all this is quite complex and involves language, culture, politics, the power of emerging nation states, and human pride. When you study what led to the split you will find that ultimately for all the other reasons that are often given it comes down to papal primacy. While the Patriarchs of the central Churches – Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople (later) – have always been given a place of honor, the primacy of the Roman Bishop was unquestionable. That was a primacy established by Christ himself in [Mathew 16:18-19](#), [Luke 22:31-32](#), and [John 21:15-19](#). The early Church – both East and West – did not question this as we see the Eastern Church in Corinth writing the fourth Pope in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century – Clement I – asking him to resolve a clerical dispute. It really did not become an issue until centuries later and for at least the first thousand years of Church history, the questioning of papal primacy in the East was a fringe claim at best.

If you like history and would like to get into the details of the dispute I would recommend two books. The First is a scholarly work by Erick Ybarra, entitled *The Papacy: Revisiting the Debate Between Catholics and Orthodox*. It is by far the most detailed and well referenced work out there on the topic. A shorter book that covers much of the same material, but not nearly at the same level of detail, and also includes a dive into other issues often used to justify the split is entitled, *Answering Orthodoxy* by Michael Lofton. Both books will take you through the reality of what happened, why it happened and what it would take for the two lungs of the Church to unite again.

**Q: I know the Catholic Church accepts the baptisms performed in Protestant denominations as valid as long as the Trinitarian formula is used. Does it matter if, in a particular denomination, baptism is considered merely symbolic vs. an efficacious sign that the Church professes baptism to be? Put a simpler way, how can the Catholic Church accept as valid a baptism that was originally performed with the belief that it was only a symbolic action? Thank you for reading my question!**

**A:** The Catholic Church accepts baptisms from other ecclesial communities, even when those communities consider them to be symbolic only, because baptism is seen as the sacramental bond of unity among all Christians and the foundation of communion. The acceptance of these baptisms is an expression of the Catholic Church's commitment to unity and ecumenism. This [DOCUMENT](#) issued in 2008 by then Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) (Now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – DDF) makes it clear when it states, “The ecumenical importance of guaranteeing true Baptism is clearer now than ever before. We call ourselves Christians in virtue of our common Baptism. With regard to the numerous persons who belong to Churches or Ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, even if there are deficiencies with regard to faith (e.g, they believe the Sacrament is symbolic only), the other sacraments and Church governance, Baptism constitutes the sacramental bond of unity, which exists among all those who by means of it have been regenerated.”

We see this determination reiterated in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in paragraph [CCC 1271](#) which states, “Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians,

including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church. Baptism therefore constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn."

All that said, I do want to add that it is not the proper form (Trinitarian formula) alone that makes the Baptism valid. The proper matter (natural water – immersed in or poured three times over the head) and the proper intent (intend to Baptize according to the prescriptions of the specific Christian ecclesial community) must also be present. In addition, for those pseudo-Christian communities like the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon's) or Jehovah's Witnesses, who do not believe in the Trinitarian God; even when they use the proper form it is invalid as they are referencing a different God when they do so.

**Q: I read an article from the Conversation about the possible connection between Vampire folklore and a disease known as porphyria, a form of heme deficiency which has symptoms similar to what is popularly ascribed to vampires (aversion to sunlight and garlic, facial deformation, etc.), apparently pretty common in the past among Eastern European nobility. It was really interesting, until I stumbled upon a statement (among others where the author draws connection between vampire traits and this disease) which tackled vampires' fear of the crucifix, and here, the author says this idea takes its root/inspiration from the fact that the Spanish Inquisition burned at the stake 600 "vampires", some of whom were actually innocent victims who had porphyria. This statement had no sources to explain where the author got this information, although to his credit he says "reportedly burned", but after that he goes on as if it was an established fact and asserts without proof that the Inquisition sent innocent sick people to the stake, adding that these people therefore had "good reasons" to fear the Christian faith and Christian symbols, hence the popular fear of crucifixes ascribed to vampires. My question is has it really happened? Were there people condemned by the Inquisition for being "vampires"? It disturbs me because although I know the Church is (of course) made up of sinful people, this idea seems really weird, since I know that usually the Church strongly opposed superstitions. The infamous witch hunts came much later, and not from the Inquisition, so I can't wrap my mind around the thought that there were Church-sponsored vampire hunts. I think it is important to address whether it is a deplorable fact of history or another element of the Black Legend, because it can hinder many people from considering Catholicism seriously.**

**A:** I want to start with some basic grounding in the Catholic faith and the Church Christ established to ensure it could build his kingdom on earth until he returned. First off, the Church has indeed done some simply horrible things. As an institution that is populated and run by humans it is guaranteed to fail to live up to the perfect standard Christ established. Christ knew this and he never promised his Church would be perfect only that, "...the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18). At the same time, Christ promised that the Spirit, "...will guide you (the Apostles and his church) into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." (John 16:13) The evil that members of the Church hierarchy have committed over the

last 2,000 years has absolutely nothing to do with the faith that Christ gave is and that the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, continues to preserve. If the Church's "black marks" prevent people from taking it seriously, the same issues which exist in every human institution that has ever existed would prevent those same people from getting involved in any group that ever existed. Trying to help people with that mindset into the Church is an unlikely proposition.

All that said, there was not just one inquisition. There were several. The Spanish inquisition is the most famous (or infamous). The Church run inquisitions are not what people have in mind when they think of inquisitions. It was the secular run inquisitions (e.g., like the Spanish inquisition) that resulted in some of more violent punishments. Many people, when faced with a potential civil trial, would often attempt to commit some sort of religious crime so that their trial could be moved to the Church courts which were known to be far less harsh in their punishments.

The overwhelming majority of what people claim about the inquisition is false and/or grossly overstated. The [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) provides a fairly objective overview [HERE](#). If you are looking for something that can clearly delineate the fact from fiction regarding the inquisition Diane Moczar's book entitled, *Seven Lies About Catholic History: Infamous Myths About The Church's Past and How To Answer Them*, is a quick read and also covers several other misrepresentations of Catholic history. If you are interested in a more complete historical coverage Steve Weidenkopf has two books that are excellent resources that cover the Inquisitions and many other important topics: 1) *The Real History of the Catholic Church* and 2) *Timeless: A History of the Catholic Church*.

In all the resources that I have examined I have been unable to find any reference to the inquisition including the persecution of suspected vampires. The fact the author of the article you mentioned does not cite his sources is unprofessional. That said, the resources identified above should help you combat any "Black Legend's" about the Church that you encounter. If you are looking for something shorter these two articles from Catholic Answers should help you – [ARTICLE 1](#) and [ARTICLE 2](#).

## Through 12/11

**Q: I have been writing a paper about big families and have run into one discouraging article after another about how having children (especially lots of children) is bad for the environment, and how the best way to decrease your environmental impact isn't recycling, or taking public transportation, but simply having less kids. What is the Catholic response weighing this and our responsibility to care for the earth?**

**A:** Let's start with the basic premise that humans are not inherently bad for the environment. Therefore, more humans would not be more inherently bad. There are actions that humans take that can damage our environment, but there is nothing essential for sustaining human life that requires us to choose those actions. We choose them out of convenience, perception that there are no alternatives, etc... We need to take responsibility for our actions and make better choices, not assume that the only solution is to have less of us.

Much of this viewpoint that humans are bad for the planet arises from bad pseudo-science done on the 1970's that relied on theories that were two centuries older. This [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers, though a bit outdated does a decent job of summarizing the misconceptions and hysteria that arose at the time and how those theories were debunked. I was living then, and I remember it well – I too was convinced that we would be packed in the streets by the time I was 30. However, the story gets even better as we now realize that there is an end in sight to global population growth as this [ARTICLE](#) from PEW research illustrates. Even the PEW data which is just four years old has proven to be incorrect as the latest population decline calculations are even more stark as this [ARTICLE](#) from earlier this year illustrates.

The reality is we are far from consuming the natural resources this planet offers. We do a terrible job of governing them (e.g. we pay farmers in the US to destroy food while in sub-Saharan Africa there is a famine), sharing them, and locating ourselves near them. While there is some upper limit to how many people our planet can sustain, this [ARTICLE](#) does a good job of explaining how we do not know what that limit is. The reality is we keep getting smarter in our use, extraction, and, in terms of food, production of the resources humans need to live. Had we failed to advance our agricultural capabilities and technology over the last 2 centuries we would have run out of food long ago. This is the type of reality that many of the population alarmists of the 1970's failed to consider – development of new resources, incredible efficiency gains in resource production and utilization, and the ability to create new technologies to replace those that damage our environment change the math considerably. Unfortunately, the damage has been done and population decline is a reality that will have significant economic and quality of life issues that will need to be overcome as we head into the next few centuries.

As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us, “In God’s plan man and woman have the vocation of **subduing’ the earth as stewards** of God. This sovereignty is not to be an arbitrary and destructive domination. God calls man and woman, made in the image of the Creator ‘who loves everything that exists,’ to share in his providence toward other creatures; hence their **responsibility for the world God has entrusted to them.**” ([CCC 373](#)) We are also told, “Man and woman were made ‘for each other’—not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be ‘helpmate’ to the other, for they are equal as persons (“bone of my bones ...”) and complementary as masculine and feminine. In marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming ‘one flesh,’ they can transmit human life: **‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’** By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents cooperate in a unique way in the Creator’s work. ([CCC 372](#)). Therefore, we must be both fruitful and multiple while using the God given gifts of intellect and will to make good stewardship decisions for the world in which we live. Choosing not to be fruitful and multiply is not a decision compatible with God’s plan for us while continuing to seek sustainable resource consumption pathways is.

**Q: Why do the names of the new testament (Mathew, Mark, John, and Luke) appear to be non-Jewish?**

A: The names of the New Testament Gospel writers do not appear to be Jewish because they were given names that were common during their time and culture. It is important to note that the names of Christians in the first three centuries did not distinctively differ from the names of

the pagans around them. The names of the apostles, such as Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddeus (Jude), Simon, and Judas Iscariot, were names that were commonly used during that time. The names of the apostles reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the time, rather than being specifically Jewish in nature.

That said, it is also important to recognize that while we believe Matthew, Mark and Luke were indeed Jewish; Luke was a Greek. In addition, we see in [Mark 2:14](#) that it is Levi (a more traditionally Jewish name) that is called. Yet in the same account in [Matthew 9:9](#) the name used is Matthew. It is interesting to note that Matthew refers to himself by his Hellenized name in his Gospel. It was not unusual for people in the first century to have both a Jewish name and a Hellenized version of that Jewish name (or a uniquely Hellenized name of their choice). A great example of that would be the Apostle Paul whose Jewish name was Saul. That said, we must also remember that we are reading an English translation. In Greek or Aramaic – the languages that would have been spoken by many of the Apostles and early Disciples. Peter, whose original name was Simon, would have been known as Kefa in Aramaic and Petras in Greek.

**Q: Why do Catholics pray to Mary and the saints instead directly to God?**

A: Let's start off by eliminating misunderstandings. Catholics don't pray to Mary and the Saints *instead* of God. We pray to God offering him our thanksgiving, adoration, contrition, and petitions. We also pray (to "pray" in this context means to make a request) to the Saints asking them to pray to God on our behalf. We know that the Saints in heaven, including Mary, are created creatures just like us. As a result, they are not worthy of worship, nor do they have that ability to answer our prayers. They can however pray on our behalf.

The key is understanding what we mean when we say we believe in the communion of Saints. We believe that those that suffer physical death but ended their earthly lives in God's friendship are more alive than we are on earth. Just as one would ask a friend or family member to pray for them (this is intercessory prayer), we believe that one can call upon the Saints to pray for us. We do not pray to the Saints in the sense that people consider prayer a form of worship.

As I stated above, the Saints are creatures like us and only God is worthy of worship. We pray to the saints to ask for their intercession with God on our behalf. As James tells us, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." ([James 5:16](#)) There are no humans more righteousness than those in heaven (Saint = someone in heaven) so asking for their intercession can be a powerful tool for us. There is no Saint in heaven closer to Jesus than his mother, so asking Mary to intercede for us has a great chance of success if what you are asking for is aligned with God's will for your good.

You can read more about the Communion of Saints and their intercession in [the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in CCC [946-962](#) (3-4 pages). This is followed immediately by a section reviewing Mary's role as the spiritual mother of the Church in [CCC 963-975](#) that will explain the power of praying for her intercession.

**Q: We went to Immaculate Conception Holy Day Mass at a parish in another diocese on our trip today. Father said we were going to celebrate the Holy Day on Sunday for the parish to celebrate their**



**Patron, the Immaculate Conception. He said therefore we had Friday of the First Week of Advent today instead. I just researched this and it looks like that is not possible-to replace a Sunday in Advent with any other Feast.**

A: I had to do a little research myself and I believe you are correct. This [DOCUMENT](#) provides some great specifics that speak directly to your question. It states:

*For the pastoral advantage of the people, it is permissible to observe on the Sundays in **Ordinary Time** those celebrations that fall during the week and have special appeal to the devotion of the faithful, provided the celebrations take precedence over these Sundays in the Table of Liturgical Days. The Mass for such celebrations may be used at all the Masses at which a congregation is present.” Therefore, **if the title of a parish is not already a solemnity in the universal calendar (St. Joseph, Immaculate Conception, etc.), then it is a solemnity in this specific church. If the feast falls during a weekday of ordinary time, then the pastor may opt to transfer the celebration on the nearest Sunday in order to underline its importance. Thus, if a parish is dedicated, for example, to St. Bonaventure or Our Lady of Mount Carmel (July 15 and 16), the solemnity could be transferred to the nearest Sunday. If, however, it was dedicated to St. Athanasius (May 2) or St. John of the Cross (December 14), this transfer to Sunday would not be possible as the Sunday of Easter and Advent has precedence over the particular solemnity. It would still be a solemnity on its proper day with all the liturgical attributes of a solemnity such as three readings, Glory, and Creed. If the proper solemnity coincided with a Sunday of higher rank (for example, St. John of the Cross falling on a Sunday of Advent), then the saint’s day would usually be transferred to the following Monday.***

The key seems to be that a transfer is possible when transferring to a Sunday in Ordinary time, but one cannot transfer into an Advent Sunday. The USCCB seems to support this as it has a [SPECIFIC RULE](#) for when the Feast of the Immaculate Conception actually falls on a Sunday (2024, 2030, 2041, etc...) in Advent – the Sunday takes precedence and the feast is moved to Monday.

**Q: Is the rod of Aaron and the staff of Moses the same thing?**

A: No. They are actually two different objects. What Moses has is actually called a “rod” which can lead to confusion (EX 4:1-3, 17, 20). In some English Bible translations when referring to Moses’s “rod” the word, “staff” is used to try to avoid confusion, but the word is actually the word for “rod” in the Hebrew. We also hear about Aaron’s “rod” in EX 7:8-13. At this point they each have a “rod” that God turned into a serpent to demonstrate his power.

As we progress through the institution of the ten plagues we see Aaron stretching out his rod (EX 7:14ff) as a means of calling up a couple of the initial plagues. The remainder are called through Moses stretching out his hands or by God acting alone. We next hear about Moses’ rod in the crossing of the Red Sea (EX 14:16). Moses’ rod comes back into play again in EX 17:5. Overall, there are 22 mentions of the rod of either Moses or Aaron in Exodus and it can be difficult to follow which one is which.

The next we hear of Aaron’s rod is in the book of Numbers – NM 17:1-12 – as a means of putting to rest who was in charge as the high priest (Aaron). From that point forward Aaron’s rod is kept with the tabernacle (along with the ten commandments and a jar of the manna). There are 11

mentions of the “rod” in Numbers – most refer to Aaron’s “rod”, but the final three times are in reference to Moses and the striking of the rock with Moses “rod” (something he was not commanded to do).

## Through 12/04

**Q: My question is, "Why are Catholic Schools so hypocritical?" It's loaded but I feel it is worth discussing. We come to mass and learn about the value of being humble and all the lessons surrounding humility vs. wealth. However, we get to our Catholic schools and the dominating families are those that use their money and power. They are the recognized ones, their names are published and their children all socialize together. Most values of the Catholic Faith just seem to be thrown out the window when it comes to sporting events, emphasis on football/sports, scholarships paid to athletes not of Catholic faith, fundraising, and interactions with the students. Specifically for [local catholic primary school], why does Santa have to come in a Bentley or Limo? Why can't he just walk through the parade? Why can't Jesus be in the parade? I am just fed up with the emphasis upon wealth and status in these schools. Today, I went to mass at [local catholic secondary school] with my son. As we are walking in, the faith formation director makes a negative comment to me about my son's windshield and that it is cracked, which I obviously know but didn't need to have that said to staff and other parents. It embarrassed both of us. But then I realized, that's what this school is about...it is about celebrating the elite and the wealthy, and calling out those with the "cracks."**

A: I can feel your pain and understand the disillusionment that you are experiencing. I experienced similar issues as my own children were travelling through Catholic grade and high school here in Orange county. In my experience, while there are great number of people – families, staff, administration - that actively promote Catholic values in all Catholic schools there seems to be growing trend where are Catholic schools have become Catholic light or little more than secular private schools with an underlying Catholic Culture. Statistics regarding academic achievement and life outcomes still almost universally support the value of a “Catholic” education despite relatively limited resources when compared to other private school options. However, to maintain that competitive advantage there are times when compromises are made to ensure that a school’s “Development” (fundraising) activities can bring in enough funds to cover the deficit between tuition and the cost of operation. Unfortunately, there are limits to what the Diocese or even the connected parish can do to combat the temptation to make these compromises.

There is no one single cause of the current state. Historically Catholic schools were established to provide an educational opportunity to immigrant Catholics that were denied entry into public and private schools in what was a protestant dominated country. You need to remember that as recently at the early 1900's that Catholics were a poor and persecuted minority in the majority of this country. Catholic schools facilitated a change that resulted in financial boom for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Catholics, which then had a “positive” impact of greater integration between Catholics and non-Catholics and Catholicism growing to exceed 25% of the population. In those early decades an entire parish would support its school, not just those families that had children enrolled. Once this began to change tuition had to climb to cover a greater percentage of the costs. However, the Catholic school system at the primary, secondary and collegiate levels remained second to none with the byproduct that non-Catholic families began to seek

admittance introducing changes to the underlying culture and accommodations to ensure those families felt welcomed.

Then the 1960's hit with the cultural and sexual revolutions, the rejection of institutional authority, and the collapse of the main source of educators in the Catholic schools – religious brothers and sisters. 1/3 of all priests and 2/3 of all religious sisters left their orders between 1960 and 1970. This placed a massive financial strain on the Catholic school system which now had to compete for lay educators who did not take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This led to more compromises in search of solutions to “out of whack” balance sheets. School closures and consolidation followed, but even that would not be enough. A pivotal moment arrived in 1967 when a number of major Catholic universities and colleges signed the Land of Lakes statement.

It was 56 years ago, on July 20-23, when Notre Dame's Father Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., gathered his peers to draft and sign the “Land O' Lakes Statement,” a declaration of the independence of Catholic universities from “authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself.” Over the course of just a few years following the statement, most Catholic colleges and universities in America shed their legal ties to the Church and handed their institutions over to independent boards of trustees. In the quest for secular prestige and government funding, many went so far as to remove the crucifixes from their classroom walls and to represent their Catholic identity in historical terms (such as, “in the Jesuit tradition”).

The wound of secularization deepened over the next few decades: many Catholic colleges and universities weakened their core curricula in favor of the Harvard model of electives and specialization, adopted a radical notion of academic freedom, embraced relativism and political correctness, and largely abandoned the project of forming young people for Christ outside the classroom.

It wasn't until 1990 that the “Land O' Lakes Statement” was soundly repudiated by Saint Pope John Paul II in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the apostolic constitution for Catholic universities. Although not yet accepted in its entirety, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* turned the tide toward renewal of Catholic identity and gave prominence to those faithful institutions that never accepted the Land O' Lakes mentality. In the meantime, however, Fr. Hesburgh's declaration did much damage. That damage naturally trickled down to the secondary and primary level as an increasing number of Catholic educators received their education from Catholic Colleges and Universities that were far too often Catholic in name only.

This brings us to where we are today. Catholic schools (especially primary and secondary schools) remain a sound value as measured by academic achievement and life outcomes. They are more often than not a solid source of community that provides a safer alternative to public school options. At the same time much work has to be done at all levels to reverse a problem that took a century to evolve and several milestone events to solidify. The Vatican has made it a priority to address the issue starting from the collegiate level and working its way down by penalizing those institutions that are not willing to meet the standards necessary. For example, Fordham University is no longer able to claim it is Catholic. Any reference to Catholicism has been replaced by references to being “In The Jesuit Tradition” mentioned above. Even that will have to change eventually so that over time it will become clear what schools are and are not

Catholic at the collegiate level. The Cardinal Newman Society publishes a guide to help parents navigate this reality (<https://cardinalnewmansociety.org/the-newman-guide/>). Unfortunately, <7% of the self-described Catholic Universities and Colleges in the United States meet the minimum bar to make the Newman list.

Once the momentum is reversed at the collegiate level the Vatican will accelerate efforts addressing the secondary and primary levels. We are starting to see some of those efforts now, although usually in response to a gross conflict with core Catholic teaching. The problem did not evolve overnight, and it will take several generations to correct. Our Church is an enormous institution, and it takes a long time for turns to be made. The success that those institutions that have embraced change and returned to classic Catholic education and faith formation is undeniable – there is a broad-based hunger for it. Ultimately, that is what will drive long-term change along with parish wide financial support returning for Catholic primary and secondary schools. If that support does not return, we will likely see these schools disaffiliated from local Churches and Diocesan control and they will become what many already are – efficiently run secular private schools.

There is much more to this as there are many convolutions in what got us here. I simply tried to hit some highlights. (I apologize for the history lesson) I have great hope that in 1-2 generations we will see substantial change. That will not help those families currently enrolled but may present an environment that their kids children will find attractive as a source of faith formation and educational excellence once again. We will actually be covering this topic in more detail at our last ELEVATE talk this winter on Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Church at 7:00 PM if you want to learn more.

My advice to parents that have these experiences is to consider home schooling. There are absolutely fantastic Catholic home-schooling networks in our area that make it much simpler than most families expect. I wish I had a better answer, but I do have faith in God's providence and hope in the eventual rise of Catholic schools once again.

**Q: In the parable of the talents in Luke, and throughout the gospels there are mentions of getting cities to share in reigning. Sorry if I'm not explaining this great. But here is the thing. When I was little, I asked my mom what Heaven was like (we had just finished a really good story book, something like Narnia) she said that God would spend eternity revealing himself to us. And I said "like a great story that never ends?" And she kinda laughed and said "yes something like that." I've clung to that thought ever since. As I've gotten older and have grown to have a deep love for our Lord (I'm discerning consecrated life) and it's turn from not just wanting to know Him but to KNOW HIM. So I guess it's kinda like, well, reigning and all that is nice but I really just want to be with My God, and explore and rejoice in everything. Is this a skewed view of Heaven? Thank you so much!**

A: Thanks for the question. I will pray that your discernment process is fruitful. I actually love the description of heaven as where, "...God would spend eternity revealing himself to us." As God is an infinite being we can indeed spend eternity growing in our understanding of him. The characterization of this as, "...a great story that never ends" is fitting.

This view of heaven aligns well with what the Church teaches us about it in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). The key paragraphs are [CCC 1023-1029](#). I have included some highlights from that section below:

*1023: Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face*

*1024: This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity—this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed—is called "heaven." Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.*

*1025: To live in heaven is "to be with Christ."*

*1027: This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."*

*1028: Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man's immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory "the beatific vision"*

Rather than being a "skewed" view of heaven I would say that both you and your Mom had some great insights into its nature and a means of describing it that makes it accessible to all.

**Q: What days did the appointed festivals in Leviticus 23 fall on? How do we understand to count the Jewish calendar? My understanding is that most of them fell on a Sunday. The Sabbath fell on the seventh day, so every 7th day of the month was the Sabbath? By extension the fourteenth day, would be the second Sabbath of the month. The festival of Unleavened Bread on the fifteenth day, so Sunday? Since the fourteenth day would be the 2nd Sabbath of the month. The offering of Firstfruits was on the day after the Sabbath, so Sunday again? The festivals of Weeks, also on a Sunday? The day after the seventh Sabbath. The Day of Atonement, not a Sunday since it is the tenth day of the month. The festival of Tabernacles, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, so a Sunday? The festival of Trumpets, first day of the month, a Sunday?**

A: This is the first time that I had the opportunity to dig into this a little and I have found it fascinating as the answer varies year to year. As it turns out the Hebrew calendar is adjusted year to year to ensure that the festivals do not fall on specific days of the week. There are four main patterns or "gates" that are used and even within a specific "gate," adjustment may be made to avoid overlap with the Sabbath. The table below summarizes how it works:

Gate	Frequency	Purim	Passover (first day)	Yom HaZikaron	Yom Ha'atzmaut	Shavuot (first day)	17 Tammuz/ Tisha B'Av	Rosh Hashanah/ Sukkot/ Shmini Atzeret (first day)	Yom Kippur	Hanukkah (first day)	10 Tevet	Tu B'Shvat	Purim Katan (only in leap years)	Gate that follows
1	31.9%	Sun	Tue	Mon*	Tue*	Wed	Tue	Thu	Sat	Wed or Thu	Wed, Thu, or Fri	Tue, Wed, or Thu	Wed or Fri	Gates 1, 3, or 4
2	28.6%	Tue	Thu	Tue	Wed	Fri	Thu	Sat	Mon	Fri or Sat	Fri or Sun	Thu or Sat	Fri or Sun	Gates 1, 2, or 3
3	28.0%	Thu	Sat	Wed†	Thu†	Sun	Sun*	Mon	Wed	Sun or Mon	Sun or Tue	Sat or Mon	Sun or Tue	Gates 1, 2, or 3
4	11.5%	Fri	Sun	Wed†	Thu†	Mon	Sun	Tue	Thu	Mon	Tue	Mon	Tue	Gates 2 or 3
				†Pushed back from Thu/Fri ‡Pushed back from Fri/Sat						*Postponed from Shabbat				

The best resource I found for this is actually [this Wikipedia page](#) which will walk you through the days of the week, months of the year, feasts, rational for calendar adjustments, those adjustments and how to keep track of it all.

If you want a good summary of all the festivals, their biblical origins, and where they fall on the Hebrew and Gregorian calendars [this ARTICLE](#) is excellent.

## Through 11/27

### Q: Was Jesus born in Palestine or does he have any lineage to Palestine?

A: Yes, Jesus was from Palestine. This fact is widely accepted and supported by both historical and biblical evidence. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a town in the region of Judea, which was part of the Roman province of Palestine during the time of His birth ([Luke 2:4-7](#)). He grew up in the town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee, which was also part of Palestine ([Matthew 2:23](#)).

The Gospels and other New Testament writings consistently refer to Jesus as being from Nazareth, a town in Palestine. For example, in [John 1:45](#), when Philip tells Nathanael about Jesus, he says, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Additionally, historical sources from the first-century, such as the works of the Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus, also mention Jesus as a figure from Palestine.

Palestine is the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, and has been controlled by many kingdoms and powers over the centuries, including Ancient Egypt, Ancient Israel and Judah, the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great and his successors, the Hasmoneans, the Roman Empire, several Muslim caliphates, and the crusaders. In modern times, the area was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, then the British Empire and since 1948 it has been divided into Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

## Week of 11/20

### Q: In our Sanctuary, on the wall behind our Altar we have a Crucifix. Is it allowed and/or "licit" to have a dual-sided Crucifix on our Altar?

A: The simple answer is, "Yes." There is no prohibition of having more than one crucifix displayed in or around the sanctuary. The [Code of Canon Law](#) does state that the practice of

displaying sacred images in churches for the reverence of the faithful is to remain in effect. However, they should be exhibited in moderate number and in suitable order to avoid confusion or inappropriate devotion. ([Canon 1188](#)) As a result, there should not be an inordinate number of crucifixes displayed.

As for where the crucifix should be displayed, the General Instructions for the Roman Missal (GIRM) – which defines the instructions and norms to be followed for the celebration of the Liturgy - states that, “...either on the altar or near it, there is to be a cross, with the figure of Christ crucified upon it, a cross clearly visible to the assembled people. It is desirable that such a cross should remain near the altar even outside of liturgical celebrations, so as to call to mind for the faithful the saving Passion of the Lord.” ([GIRM, 308](#)) The instruction from the GIRM can be, and often is, interpreted to indicate that there is a preference for having the crucifix on the Altar itself and not displayed on a wall, hanging in free space, or standing on the side of the sanctuary. As a matter of fact The [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) provides some insight into this preference in this [ENTRY](#) that states, “...the crucifix is placed on the altar to remind the celebrant and the people that the Victim offered on the altar is the same as was offered on the Cross. It should be placed at the middle of the altar between the candlesticks and be large enough to be conveniently seen by both the celebrant and the people. If for any reason the crucifix is removed, another may take its place in a lower position, but it must always be visible to all who assist at Mass.” Having the crucifix on the Altar for the celebrant to see at all times is a powerful reminder of what is actually being celebrated, who is really celebrating, and who is offering the sacrifice.

If you would like to know a little more about the history of the use of the crucifix in the liturgy – both on the altar and as part of the processions you can take a look at this [ARTICLE](#) from the Catholic Encyclopedia. The presence of a large crucifix attached to the wall of Church or to be found free standing in or around the sanctuary (not on the altar itself) is not an innovation, but only became near universal in recent history where it became impractical to have a crucifix on the altar that was large enough to be visible to all in an expansive Church.

**Q: When should you use the church holy water before mass or after?**

A: Holy Water is what is known as a Sacramental. According to the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) as Sacramentals, “...are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.... They always include a prayer, often accompanied by a specific sign, such as the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, or the sprinkling of holy water (which recalls Baptism).” ([CCC 1667-1668](#))

According to the Catholic tradition, it is customary to bless oneself with holy water both on the way into and on the way out of a church. This practice is a sign of reverence and a reminder of one's baptismal promises. By blessing oneself with holy water, a person recalls their baptismal promises and seeks God's grace and protection as they enter or leave the church. When entering a church, blessing oneself with holy water is a way of preparing oneself spiritually for the sacred space and the encounter with God. It is a gesture of humility, acknowledging one's need for purification and grace before entering into the presence of the Divine. On the way out of the church, blessing oneself with

holy water is a way of carrying the graces received during the liturgical celebration and bringing them into the world. It serves as a reminder to live out one's faith and baptismal promises in daily life, seeking God's protection and guidance.

While the act of blessing oneself with holy water upon entering or exiting a church is not a strict requirement, it is a pious practice that many Catholics follow as a way of expressing their faith and seeking spiritual blessings. It is a personal devotion that can deepen one's connection to the sacraments and the Church's liturgical life.

**Q: Read this news article, how does the Catholic Church explain the weeping Virgin Mary Statue? A miracle?** <https://share.newsbreak.com/5f5hptfd>

A: The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) defines a miracle as, "As sign or wonder, such as a healing or the control of nature, which can only be attributed to divine power." The Vatican investigates reported miracles by following a specific process outlined in various Catholic documents that are specific to the type of event being reported as a miracle. For example, in the case of a reported medical miracle medical experts (secular and religious) prepare a report evaluating the quality of the medical and technical witnesses involved. Additionally, the postulator (the individual authorized by the local Bishop to present the case for the miracle) must present a brief and accurate report on the circumstances of the case, a list of witnesses, and all relevant documents, including medical and clinical records, test results, and laboratory exams.

The Dicastery for the Causes of Saints plays a crucial role in the investigation of medical miracles. The Dicastery examines alleged miracles through a series of meetings. The conclusions of these meetings are recorded in an accurate report. If, after careful analysis of the data collected by experts, the conclusion is that there is no natural explanation for the event, the Church will declare the event worthy of belief. It does not mean all Catholics are required to believe it; simply that the Church has determined that there is not natural explanation for the event.

In the case of the weeping virgin statue discussed in the linked article, until the local Bishop initiates and submits the results of a local investigation to the Vatican the Church will have no position on its authenticity. The vast majority of reported miracles are found to have natural explanations when investigations are conducted by experts at the local level so very few actually make it all the way to the Vatican.

The bottom line is the church always seeks to identify a natural explanation when confronted with an event or phenomena that seems miraculous on the surface. As the article linked in this question points out there are natural means of producing the effect of the statue weeping so until all of those means are ruled out, first at the local level and then at the Vatican, there will be no official Church commentary on this event.

**Q: Given what's been made known of the removal of Bishop Strickland, would there be any moral justification of the pope to remove him from his office? And how about if he defrocks him?**

A: The first thing to note is that we know very little regarding the reason for the removal. All we actually know for a fact is:



- In June an Apostolic visitation was ordered to perform an exhaustive inquiry into all aspects of the governance and leadership of the diocese of Tyler under Bishop Strickland. That visit was completed by two American Bishops – Bishop Emeritus Gerald Kicanas of Tucson and Bishop Dennis Sullivan of Camden.
- Earlier this month the two Bishops made the recommendation to Pope Francis that Bishop Strickland be removed from his office based upon what they discovered during their visitation.
- On November 9<sup>th</sup> Bishop Strickland was asked to resign. He refused. Typically, Bishops are always asked to resign their office when it becomes clear that they can no longer move forward in the role.
- Since Bishop Strickland refused to resign on November 11<sup>th</sup> he was removed from his office as Bishop of Tyler by Pope Francis and replaced by Bishop Joe Vasquez of Austin who will serve as the Apostolic Administrator of Tyler until a replacement is named.

The Vatican did not release the results of the Apostolic visitation or specific reasons for Bishop Strickland's removal. This lack of clarity is not uncommon in events like this as the Vatican tends to keep matters of ecclesial discipline private unless they involve very specific subjects that Canon Law requires full disclosure to be made or there is already widespread knowledge of specific incidents and/or issues that could lead to a Bishop's removal.

Everything else that is being published about Bishop Strickland's removal is pure speculation including Bishop Strickland's own speculation offered in this [ARTICLE](#). While speculation is interesting, it is of no real value. As a result, it would be impossible to comment on the morality of the action taken. That said, the Pope has the ability to take this type of action for a wide variety of reasons as in the article linked above Bishop Strickland points out, "...that Pope Francis has the authority to remove him from diocesan governance, and frequently encouraged those upset or confused by the development to pray for the Pope and not to leave the Church."

As of right now Bishop Strickland remains a Bishop, albeit a Bishop without a Diocese. This will likely be the case moving forward until such time as the current or future Pope decides otherwise while Bishop Strickland is not retired. [The Code of Canon Law](#) defines the requirements for one to become a Bishop, Bishop appointments, a Bishop's Oath of Fidelity, Scope of a Bishops responsibilities and authority, Removal of Bishops, etc.... in [Canons 375-411](#). As for being "defrocked" you are likely referring to the process of a priest losing his clerical state (more commonly known as laicization). You can read about that in [Canons 290-293](#). At this point, there is no indication that something has been done by Bishop Strickland that would dictate this and there is a specific Canonical process that must be employed to do so.

Unfortunately, we simply do not have nearly enough facts to comment intelligently on the reasons for Bishop Strickland's removal or any possible next steps. I know that is not satisfying, but we must all be patient and recognize that we have no right to any more information than has already been released.

**Q: What is a good response to fellow Christians who are not catholic, and catholic, when they say that the Pope is leading people astray with his synods and vague responses to important questions? Thank you so much.**

A: Unfortunately, it is a common one these days. Since this really isn't a matter of Church teaching all I can do is offer you the approach I use. It's a simple two-step process.

1. I start by asking them to provide the specific statement made by the pope that they believe is "leading people astray" or which is vague enough to cause doctrinal confusion.
  - a. In almost every case the individual making this type of claim has not actually read the pope's official statements and has simply picked up the interpretation of those statements from a commentator in the media or from someone claiming knowledge on the near infinite number of internet channels available that give everyone a voice.
  - b. In the rare cases that the individual can identify an official statement that they believe "fits the bill" I ask them to identify the elements of it that conflict with Catholic teaching (Dogma, Infallible Doctrine, or Mutable Doctrine). To my knowledge, there have been ZERO examples of an official papal statement from pope Francis that has conflicted with Dogmatic or Doctrinal teachings.
  - c. After recognizing that Pope Francis has not taught anything that conflicts with Church teaching on Faith and Morals, the individual usually moves on to claim that the real problem is that while the pope does indeed reiterate Church teaching, he combines that with pastoral guidance that allows those that do want to deviate from Church teaching to do so.
2. At this point I once again ask them to provide a specific example and, in this case, they usually can offer at least one (e.g., the possibility of offering individual engaged in a same sex relationship a blessing under certain pastoral circumstances). I then take the example and ask the individual how they would have worded the pastoral advice offered.
  - a. Many want a "black and white" response without the pastoral advice, but it is usually pretty easy to identify situations that are not simply "black and white".
  - b. Example:
    - i. The pope has made it clear that marriage can only be between a man and a woman.
    - ii. The pope has also made it clear that one should never offer a blessing if that blessing could be interpreted as approval of sinful behavior.
    - iii. Yet, the pope has stated that individual priests may use their pastoral judgement to offer one or more persons engaged in some form of non-marital sexual relationship (same sex or heterosexual) a blessing if the specific situation makes it possible.
    - iv. In this case offer the following scenario to make the individual think.
      1. Two men who have been living together as a "couple" for two decades approach a priest and inform him that they are now trying to live as brothers according to Church teaching.

2. The two men ask the priest for a blessing to give them the strength they need to practice mastery of self and live according to Church teaching – living a life of chastity.
3. Should the priest offer the blessing recognizing their sincere desire to live according to Church teaching or should he reject it based upon their past sinful behavior? Another way of posing this would be to ask, “Did Jesus demand sinners stop sinning to meet him or because they met him, did they come to love him and then cease to sin?”

With these two steps I can usually weed out the inflammatory rhetoric and get someone to consider why Pope Francis tends to leave room for pastoral discernment and action.

I do acknowledge that the approach Pope Francis chooses to employ can make most uncomfortable – it makes me cringe at times. Pope Francis told us he wanted to “make a mess” and he has been true to his word. He makes it clear where the lines are drawn and will act when the line is crossed (and he has the authority to do so by virtue of his office and canon law), but he does not stop anyone from getting as close as possible to that line. While I personally wish Pope Francis would give people “less rope” I also acknowledge that by doing so he is allowing opinions and desires that would have continued to fester underground to see the light of day. There is an argument to be made, that by doing so, Pope Francis is offering those in error an opportunity to come to an understanding of the truth through dialog or, at the very least, expose their true colors for all to see.

Finally, I always remind those that are pulling their hair out over Francis that Jesus made us two important promises about the Church he established: 1) the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and 2) the Holy Spirit will guide it to all truth. Over 2,000 years and 267 popes we have had our share of unscrupulous characters sitting in the chair of Peter (far more have been Saints) and Christ’s promises have never failed us. If one’s faith is rooted in Christ, there is really nothing to worry about. You can make the argument that Francis himself acts out of a fearless belief in these two promises.

## Week of 11/13

**Q: Does our Roman Catholic Church, its authority, the Pope and Clergy allow the hearing or watching the Holy Sacrifice of the Holy Mass or the celebration of the Holy Mass or the Mass while at home on TV or Social Medias or online and will the person watching still get or receive the graces and merits as in the actual attendance of the Holy Mass though minus the reception of the Holy Eucharist? Will the person hearing or watching the Holy Mass on TV or social medias receive the graces and merits of the Holy Mass as in the attendance of the person in the actual regular Mass or Sunday Mass? Will it still be meritable to the person watching at home on TV or social media or by watching Holy Mass online; the merits, then graces, the indulgences.**

A: The simple answer is that watching Mass online is not a replacement for in-person participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The code of Canon Law states, “On Sundays and

other holydays of obligation, the faithful are obliged to assist at Mass. They are also to abstain from such work or business that would inhibit the worship to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the due relaxation of mind and body." ([Canon 1247](#)) The Ordinary for a Diocese (the Bishop) can dispense the faithful in his diocese from the obligation to be physically present at Mass for "just cause" (e.g., a pandemic). In addition, a Pastor can offer an individual the same dispensation as described in [Canon 1245](#).

That said, in person participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass allows one to encounter God in four distinct ways – through the presence of other Baptized members of the Body of Christ, through the celebrating priest acting "in persona Christi" (in the person of Christ), through God's Word proclaimed from the Ambo, and through God's real presence in the Eucharist. Online viewing of the Mass deprives one of at least two, and possibly three (if watching alone), of these means of encountering God. Hence, while there are certainly graces that can be obtained through watching Mass, they are not equivalent to being physically present from the celebration. At the same time, while Spiritual Communion can be powerful it cannot replace the physical reception of the God – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity – in the Eucharist.

So, while one can be dispensed with the requirement that they are physically present at Mass either by their Diocesan Bishop (who can dispense all within his Diocese) or by one's Pastor (who can offer that dispensation individually on a case-by-case basis) if there is just cause; online participation in Mass does not then provide the same experience or graces. This would apply to indulgence requirements as well when the reception of an indulgence includes active participation in a Mass at a specific location.

**Q: Is Jesus the real name of God? Is there another name? How can I call Him when I pray, when I need him, or just when I want to talk to him?**

A: In Exodus 3:13-15 God reveals his name to Moses as we read, "Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?'" God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the sons of Israel, The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.'" In ancient Hebrew "I AM WHO I AM" translates into YHWH (Ancient Hebrew had no vowels) and we write in English as Yahweh (YAA-WAY). [CCC 209](#) informs us that, "Out of respect for the holiness of God, the people of Israel do not pronounce his name. In the reading of Sacred Scripture, the revealed name (YHWH) is replaced by the divine title "LORD" (in Hebrew Adonai, in Greek Kyrios). It is under this title that the divinity of Jesus will be acclaimed: 'Jesus is LORD.'"

When the second person of the Trinity became incarnate 2,000 years ago, he was given the name Jesus (which means "God Saves"). This is the name that the angel commanded Joseph to give to the son born of Mary in [Matthew 1:18-25](#). Hence, you can certainly use the name, "Jesus" to address any prayers directed to the Son (the second person of the Trinity). You could also feel free to simply say "God" or "Father" when addressing the first person of the Trinity or

“God” or “Holy Spirit” when addressing the third person of the Trinity. If addressing all three persons of the Trinity you could simply use “God”. Of course, you are also welcome to use Yahweh, Lord, Adonai or Kyrios. God is just happy that you are speaking with him and will welcome any of the names that he has given us. (NOTE: Jehovah is NOT one of the names that God offered to us. It is a name that was fabricated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by combining YHWH with the vowels from Adonai while replacing the Jewish “Y” with its Greek equivalent “J”)

### **Q: Why do Catholics believe in infant Baptism?**

A: The simple answer is we see it in Sacred Scripture, and it has been a tradition of the Church going back to the first century. Let's start with a couple of Biblical references. In [Acts 16:15, 31, 33](#) we see three references to entire households being baptized together. Naturally, a household would include any newborns. We see a similar reference in [1 Corinthians 1:16](#), where St. Paul writes, “I did baptize also the household of Stephanas.” When we combine verses such as these with Christ's own words such as, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God” ([Mark 10:14](#)), it becomes difficult to justify delaying Baptism in any way shape or form.

Historically, since the Baptism replaced the Jewish rite of circumcision (See [Colossians 2:11-12](#) – Baptism replaces circumcision) as the visible means by which one entered into God's family; it only made sense that infants would be baptized as Jewish children are circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day following birth. This is why early Church fathers supported infant Baptism. For example; St. Hippolytus of Rome (C. AD 215) stated, “Baptize first the children; and if they can speak for themselves, let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them.” (Apostolic Tradition, 21) Origen (C. AD 244) adds, “The Church received from the Apostles the tradition of giving Baptism also to infants.” (Commentary on Romans 5, 9).

For the first 1500 years of Christianity there was no question that infant Baptism was the norm. It was not until the Protestant revolution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the objection to infant Baptism was raised. The objection was based upon the claim that since infants could not profess faith on their own that they should not be Baptized as the faith of the parents cannot be a replacement for the faith of the child. However, those same Protestant “theologians” seem to forget the many instances in Scripture where the faith of one person resulted in the salvation of another. A great example of this is found in the story of the Centurion's servant being healed in [Matthew 8:5-13](#) where Jesus tells the Centurion, “Go; be it done for you as you have believed.” Another example can be found in [Matthew 15:21-28](#) where Jesus tells the Canaanite woman, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.”

The bottom line is that there is no Scriptural or historical support for delaying Baptism. The delay of Baptism until after the age of reason was a Protestant creation that rejects Christ's own model, the practices of the Apostles, and the authority he gave to the Church to establish norms for Sacramental initiation in Matthew 16 and 18.

**Q: If a baby dies before being born (e.g., miscarriage) does the baby go to heaven as they have not been baptized?**

A: The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission.” ([CCC 1213](#)) Without passing through the “gateway” via Baptism salvation is not open to us. As Peter tell us, “Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” ([1 Peter 3:21](#)) The Catechism makes this clear as well when it says, “The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation ([John 3:5](#)). He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them ([Matthew 28:18-19](#)). Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament ([Mark 16:16](#)). The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude.” ([CCC 1257](#))

All that said the Church also teaches us that, “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.” ([CCC 1257](#)) This means that for those of us that are aware of Baptism and have the opportunity to be baptized, Baptism remains the only means of entry into God’s family. For those that are not aware of the necessity of Baptism and/or do not have the opportunity to be Baptized God can work in other ways. This is why the Catechism goes on to say, “As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children which caused him to say: ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them,’ allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism.” ([CCC 1261](#))

So the bottom line is that while we have no explicit revelation of what happens to children who die without being Baptized we have great reason to hope that God has welcomed them into his presence.

**Q: Is there reincarnation?**

A: No. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us in [CCC 1013](#), “Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When "the single course of our earthly life' is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: 'It is appointed for men to die once.' There is no 'reincarnation' after death.” As we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, “...just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment...” ([Hebrews 9:27](#))

Now...if you would like a little more on reincarnation from both the faith and science perspective Jimmy Akin (Catholic Answers Senior Apologist) does a create job covering it in these two Mysterious World podcasts - [#275](#) and [#276](#).

**Q: Greetings, please explain the meaning of "conditional" or "provisional" baptism. My deceased father claimed I was baptized in a Catholic church as an infant. No mention of location but it was probably in Sacramento or Indianapolis. What constitutes a "reasonable search" for my baptismal record (if any)? Would I have to contact every Catholic parish in those two cities? All possible witnesses are either deceased or uncooperative.**

A: A conditional baptism is a sacramental rite performed by the Catholic Church when there is doubt about the validity of a previous baptism. It is administered conditionally, meaning that if the previous baptism is determined to be valid, the conditional baptism has no effect. [The Code of Canon Law](#), specifically [Canon 869](#), addresses the topic stating, "If there is a doubt whether a person has been baptized or whether baptism was conferred validly and the doubt remains after a serious investigation, baptism is to be conferred conditionally." This doubt may arise due to unclear or insufficient information about the form or matter of the previous baptism, if there are concerns about the intention or validity of the minister who performed the baptism or if no physical proof that the baptism occurred can be located.

The conditional baptism is performed by a validly ordained minister, a priest or deacon, using the proper form and matter of the sacrament. The minister says the words of baptism, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," while pouring water over the person's head or immersing them in water. For a conditional baptism the minister simply precedes the words (the proper form) of baptism with, "In the event that you have not been baptized..." The conditional baptism is not meant to undermine or invalidate the previous baptism but is performed as a precautionary measure to ensure that the individual receives the sacrament if the previous baptism was not valid or no valid record can be obtained. It is a way for the Church to provide certainty and assurance of the individual's reception of the sacrament of baptism.

Unfortunately, today, it is not uncommon for people to struggle to get a copy of their sacramental records. This is especially the case when the sacrament was conferred outside the United States. Usually an affidavit (a simple letter from a witness) and / or a picture is accepted to verify that a Catholic baptism was conferred. In the event proof of that nature cannot be obtained, a conditional baptism is a sure means of providing peace of mind. In our parish we perform 7-10 conditional baptisms annually and the number increases every year.

A reasonable search in this case would include a letter to the Diocesan office for Sacramento and Indianapolis explaining this situation and requesting their assistance. The Diocesan offices will likely respond with a list of the parishes that were in existence when you would have been baptized (both have > 100 now) but could possibly provide you with the record itself. You could try to contact all of the parishes identified, but it would not be expected. If you are able to narrow it down (pictures often help with this) it may make it easier, but if the Diocese can not give you much help I would speak with your pastor and see if he agrees that a conditional baptism is in order.

**Q: Can the souls in purgatory intercede for us if we ask them in our prayers?**

A: Absolutely! As a matter of fact, on November 27th we will be asking the Souls in Purgatory to pray for our loved ones at the **St. Monica's Club Holy Hour**.

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) explains the concept of the communion of saints, which includes the belief that the faithful on Earth, the souls in Purgatory, and the saints in Heaven are all united in the Body of Christ. This unity allows for intercessory prayer, where the faithful can ask for the prayers and intercession of those in Heaven and Purgatory.

Paragraph [958](#) of the Catechism states, "Communion with the dead. 'In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' she offers her suffrages for them.'" This paragraph acknowledges the Church's practice of praying for the dead and offering suffrages (prayers, sacrifices, and acts of charity) for their souls. It indicates that the Church has a longstanding tradition of honoring the memory of the deceased and praying for their release from sin.

Furthermore, paragraph [1032](#) explains the concept of Purgatory, stating, "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death, they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." This paragraph affirms the belief that souls in Purgatory are undergoing purification to attain the holiness required for entering Heaven. While they cannot pray for themselves, they can intercede for others and offer prayers to God on behalf of the living.

Therefore, according to Catholic teaching, the souls in Purgatory, being part of the communion of saints, can indeed pray for us and offer their intercession to God on our behalf.

**Q: Can a baptized catholic receive communion even though they've never made a first communion.**

A: That is an excellent question. Thanks for sending it in. The preparation for the reception of first communion includes two critical elements: 1) catechesis on the "what?", "why?", and graces of the Sacrament and 2) preparation for and reception of the Sacrament of penance so that one can be prepared to receive the Eucharist worthily. Technically, according the Code of Canon Law, "Any baptized person who is not forbidden by law may and must be admitted to holy communion." (Canon 912) However, if one has not been properly catechized so that he / she understands the essential elements of the Sacrament and believes that it is indeed the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord, the individual could be receiving unworthily and hence committing the grave sin of Sacrilege. The same is true for someone who approaches for reception of the Eucharist in a state of mortal sin (hence the need for sacramental reception prior to one's first reception and every time one falls into a state of mortal sin).

This is why, that even for Baptized adults, the church recommends (and most Bishops require) some form of catechesis prior to reception of the Eucharist for the first time. We want to avoid putting well intentioned people in a position where they could be committing a grave sin



through reception of the Eucharist. Most parishes offer both formal and informal adult faith formation programs to help prepare adults for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Communion/Eucharist). I would strongly recommend that any Baptized adult who is seeking to receive Communion for the first time contact their parish and inquire about preparation for reception.

## Week of 11/06

**Q: Why did God not only create us but our planet, the stars the dirt we walk on, things that have no emotions/feelings?**

A: That is certainly an interesting question. I am going to start with the obvious – without those things we could not exist. Human nature is such that we must live in an environment that can sustain us physically as we are material / spiritual beings. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches us in [CCC 362](#), “The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual.”

That said, God also wanted us to have the dignity of being able to participate in his creation so, “God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him: What is it that is about to be created, that enjoys such honor? It is man—that great and wonderful living creature, more precious in the eyes of God than all other creatures! For him the heavens and the earth, the sea and all the rest of creation exist. God attached so much importance to his salvation that he did not spare his own Son for the sake of man. Nor does he ever cease to work, trying every possible means, until he has raised man up to himself and made him sit at his right hand.” ([CCC 358](#))

Finally, God created the world around us so that by study of, “...the world’s order and beauty, one can come to a knowledge of God as the origin and the end of the universe.” ([CCC 32](#)) In other words, “God, who creates and conserves all things by his Word, provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities.” ([CCC 54](#)) This is the wonder of scientific discovery – by studying the physical world in which we live we can come to a greater understanding of its Creator – God. This allows us to draw closer to God and better appreciate all that he has done, and continues to do, for us purely out of love, as there is nothing he needs or can gain from us.

**Q: Just a couple questions, one is much longer than the other. The first question is: can Christians be possessed? Or is Demonic Oppression and Obsession the only things that can happen? What about Fallen-Away Christians? The second is this: I was reading this article from Catholic Answers: <https://www.catholic.com/audio/sp/does-devotion-to-mary-draw-us-away-from-jesus> And it was going through and explaining how we and the saints can technically “save” others, such as by praying for them (this section of the article is pretty far down). The article also mentioned Wills from the Medieval period which include both requests for God’s mercy and for salvation intercession from the Saints (like asking the Saints to obtain God’s forgiveness for us). I can understand how we can ask the Saints to “save” others (I put this in quotations to differentiate it from Christ’s unique role), but in the case of asking the Saints to pray for our forgiveness, as well as asking God for forgiveness, wouldn’t**

**that mean we have True Contrition, which would mean that we would be forgiven anyway (If we couldn't get to confession, that is)? Thank you for your time!**

A: Thanks for the questions. I want to start with the second one first. Let's begin by exploring the distinction between perfect and imperfect contrition. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us in paragraph [1452](#), "When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it ***includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible*** (emphasis added)." Meanwhile we read in paragraph [1453](#) that, "The contrition called "imperfect" (or "attrition") is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear)...by itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance."

With the distinction between perfect and imperfect contrition clarified I hope you can see that it is quite possible to have "true" but imperfect contrition born out of the fear of the punishment of hell rather than the perfect contrition that arises out of love of God. In that case, our sins would not be forgiven and requesting the saints to pray on our behalf would not be in vain. In addition, since there is no way for us to know that we have perfect contrition with absolute certainty we should not make that assumption. Also note, that even with perfect contrition, we are forgiven with the understanding that we will pursue sacramental confession as early as we possibly can (see emphasized statement above). Perfect contrition alone, without the firm resolution to pursue sacramental confession is not enough to ensure God's forgiveness for mortal sins.

Now we can move on to your first question concerning the possibility of a Christian – actively practicing or fallen away – being possessed by a demon. In the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#), it is mentioned that while a Christian cannot be "possessed" by a demon in terms of the soul being controlled or deprived of liberty, the influence of the demon can extend to attacking the body from outside (obsession) or assuming control of it from within (possession). The soul itself remains free, but its control over the body may be hindered by the obsessing spirit (see this [Encyclopedia Entry](#)). Therefore, it can be understood that according to Catholic doctrine, a Christian (practicing or fallen away), someone who has received valid baptism, can be subject to the influence of evil spirits and that can certainly manifest as bodily control, but their soul cannot be possessed by a demon.

**Q: Why is it called Adam's sin when Eve was the first to be tempted and eat of the fruit? My question relates to the supposed misogynistic attitude toward woman--I am thinking of St. Augustine, although I do not know if this portrayal of his attitude towards women and sex is accurate--because of Eve's giving in to the temptation and seduction by the serpent. If she is primarily to blame, again because she was the first to interact with the serpent, then giving the fruit to the man--why is it referred to as Adam's sin, not Eve's sin? I think calling it Eve's sin might lend a bit more weight to the idea of longstanding misogyny towards women, but calling it Adam's sin would seem to put more blame on the man and mitigate against this misogyny.**

A: I want to draw your attention to several brief passages in Genesis – [Genesis 2:16-17](#), [Genesis 3:6](#), [Genesis 3:8](#), [Genesis 3:16-19](#). In the first passage we see clearly that the commandment to refrain from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil was given to Adam prior to Eve’s creation. In the second passage we see Eve falling victim to the lies of the devil by taking and eating the fruit. Yet we also see she immediately, turns and hands the fruit to Adam who was clearly right there all along observing what was happening. In the third passage we find that the man (Adam) and his wife (Eve) hid themselves from God out of shame. Finally, in the last passage, we see God’s punishment for Adam and Eve delineated, and while both are punished, Adam’s is more severe. We also see in that final passage that God specifically reminds Adam that it was him to whom God gave the command.

So here is what happened.

1. God communicated the command to Adam not Eve making Adam responsible for its adherence.
2. God made Adam a helper (Eve) who was to become his wife ([Genesis 2:18-25](#)). A husband’s prime duty is to protect and serve his wife. A husband commits to die to himself by putting his wife’s needs first and to even offer his life for her, if necessary. Marriage is clearly ordered to the good of the spouse (See [CCC 1601, 1616](#)).
3. Adam stood by and watched to see what would happen to his wife when she defied God’s command. It was a command Adam clearly communicated to her, but a command that was given to him and him alone. Rather than enforcing God’s command and protecting his spouse Adam simply stood by.
4. The bottom line is that not only did Adam choose against God, but he allowed his wife to do the same (almost as if he was allowing her to defy God to see what would happen to her before he did the same) putting her life at risk. Rather than defy the devil and possibly die for his spouse (many theologians find an implied threat in the Devil’s statement in [Genesis 3:4](#)) Adam choose to test God’s command by allowing his wife to violate it and suffer the consequences.

This is why we consider it Adam’s sin. The Church recognizes that this physical act was a sin committed by both Eve and Adam. However, the underlying culpability for the sin is attributed primarily to Adam (see [CCC 402-405](#)) even though both Adam and Eve committed personal sin in falling to the temptation of the devil.

**Q: Why do so many people receive the Eucharist in their hands instead of the mouth? Does holy family church only give Eucharist in the hand, because I’ve always received it in the mouth?**

A: Reception of the Eucharist in either the hand or on the tongue are both completely valid methods of reception in the Latin Rite of the Mass (see General Instructions of the Roman Missal – Norms for Distribution of Communion Under Both Kinds, #41). In the early Church reception by hand was the norm and we have great saints like Cyril of Jerusalem that provided specific instructions for how to receive Christ presence by, “making a throne for the King with your hands.” Over time, as the result of many factors, reception on the tongue became the norm. It helped prevent (but did not eliminate) those with malicious intent from deliberately

damaging the Eucharist. At the same time, receiving on one's tongue and in a kneeling position was a visible sign of one's humility and reverence.

That said, reverence is not something that is tied to one physical act or another – it is a spiritual state. One can appear to be very reverent while actually being quite irreverent. Jesus called out the Pharisees for this when he says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So, you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” ([Matthew 23:27-28](#))

From time to time across Church history there have been periods where reception of the Eucharist shifted from tongue to hand and back (e.g., because of fear of spreading fatal diseases) with multiple periods like today where receiving both ways was allowed. In the late 1960's and early 1970's the Church opened the door for countries to petition to allow reception once again in the hand and the Bishop's conference of most countries did this.

There is no Church Doctrine that defines the proper means of Eucharistic reception. The methods we use are allowable practices (not Doctrines) of our faith and the Church has the ability to change practices as it needs to for the good of the faithful. For example, one thing many who question reception in the hands ignore is that in many cultures reception on the tongue would be offensive and/or can lead many to become self-conscious. This in turn, led many to avoid reception and the Church in its wisdom, recognized that helping the faithful overcome these challenges was in their best interest.

**Q: How do I overcome the internal conflict I have regarding the Catholic Church and the atrocities they have committed in the past. Treatment of native Americans, molestation etc. I'm fully on board with the teachings but struggling with the past and how to share my religion with others when these issues come up repeatedly.**

A: (THIS IS A COPY OF A RESPONSE PROVIDED EARLIER – THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW QUESTIONS THAT COMES UP OVER AND OVER AGAIN)

This is a great question and one that every Catholic should have a reasonable answer for. I would like to start by recognizing a reality, “The Church, from the very beginning and at every point in its development, has been marked to varying degrees by sin, scandal, stupidity, misbehavior, misfortune, and wickedness.” (Barron, Robert; Letter to a Suffering Church). The Church is composed of humans and all humans are broken to varying degrees. That means that there will be humans in the Church that fail miserably and commit grave evils. There always has been such people in the Church and there always will be. Jesus himself selected a betrayer (Judas), a denier (Peter) and a doubter (Thomas) to be amongst his inner circle. Moses was a murderer and King David was an adulterer, yet God selected them to implement his divine plan despite their human failings. The amazing this is not that there have been evil people in the Church but rather that there have been great saints.

We don't leave Jesus and the Church he founded because of Judas. As Saint Paul tells us, “...we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves...” (2 Corinthians 4:7) and as Bishop Barron points out, “The Vessels

are all fragile and many of them are downright broken' but we don't stay because of the vessels. We stay because of the treasure." Jesus never promised the Church would be perfect. He promised it would never fail (Matthew 16:18) and for the last 2,000 years that promise has been kept. We stay in the Church and promote/share the Good News of Jesus Christ recognizing that we are all striving to live up to that standard and with few exceptions (saints) most of us will fall short and some of us will fall far short.

When people question the Catholic Church they are right in doing so. We should hold the Church and its leaders to a higher standard. That said, we must also keep in mind the words of wisdom that C. K. Chesterton offers us when he states, "When people impute special vices to the Christian Church, they seem entirely to forget that the world has these vices much more. The Church has been cruel; but the world has been much crueler. The Church has plotted; but the world has plotted much more. The Church has been superstitious; but it has never been so superstitious as the world is when left to itself. The world will do all that is has ever accused the Church of doing and do it much worse, and do it on a much larger scale, and do it without any standards for a return to sanity or any motives for a movement of repentance."

There are two lessons we all must keep in mind when considering the many failings of the men and women within the Church over the last 2,000 years:

Lesson 1: While we can never minimize the horrors of victims of Church scandal, we can thank God that they come to light and that we, the faithful, are encouraged (not suppressed) to continue to highlight them, hold the church accountable and help restore it. Across the history of Church scandal God has consistently raised up brave men and women to drive reform and repair.

Lesson 2: We should not allow ourselves to become the farmers that burned down the barn to get rid of the rats. We need to fight for Christ's Church as members of the Church Militant, not abandon it to its enemies because some of them have found their way inside its walls.

I would like to end this response with a quote from Hillaire Belloc, the Franco-English writer and historian of the early twentieth century. Belloc was also an orator, poet, sailor, satirist, writer of letters, soldier, and political activist who offered this statement about the Church, "The Catholic Church is an institution I am bound to hold divine – but for the unbelievers a proof of its divinity might be found in the fact that no merely human institution conducted with such knavish imbecility would have lasted a fortnight."

**Q: In the 1790s during the Second Great Awakening in America, people were meeting up in groups and camps and reviving their faith. Preachers preached to them and converted many, however it is recorded in history that a multitude of people had "the jerks." Uncontrollable jerks that made people fall over or scream. What does the Catholic Church teach what happened and why? Was there something spiritual involved with these "jerks"?**

A: It is always interesting to be reminded of some of the many examples of unusual events that occurred during the Great Awakening in the United States. To begin with, the Church rarely offers any definitive opinion on faith practices / manifestations found in other ecclesial

communities. The Church is interested in sharing and safeguarding the Good News of Jesus Christ. Unless something is in direct conflict with the teachings of Christ there is no official position offered.

The Catholic Church acknowledges that charismatic gifts have been present throughout the history of the Church and continue to be active today. These gifts can take various forms, such as prophecy, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and others. They are given to individuals as a special empowerment by the Holy Spirit to serve the Church and contribute to the work of evangelization. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) provides insight into the Catholic position on charismatic gifts: "Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world" ([CCC 799](#)).

However, the Catholic Church also emphasizes the need for discernment and proper use of charismatic gifts. The Catechism states: "Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms" ([CCC 800](#)).

This means that while charismatic gifts are recognized and appreciated, they should be exercised in accordance with the teachings of the Church and guided by the virtue of charity. The Church encourages individuals with charismatic gifts to use them for the good of the Church and the world, but also emphasizes the importance of discernment and obedience to the authority of the Church. Finally, the Catechism informs us, "...that discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred to and submitted to the Church's shepherds. 'Their office [is] not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good,' so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together 'for the common good.'" ([CCC 801](#))

The bottom line is that manifestations of the spirit are possible but an indication of their reality / genuine nature would be their ability to be used to promote and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. If such gifts / manifestations are not geared towards sharing the Good News we should, as the Catechism informs us, question them. The Church would only engage in offering an official position on any individual manifestations of the Spirit if making such a declaration became necessary to preserve the faithful from error and harm. If you would like to read more about the Church's position on the manifestation of spiritual / charismatic gifts you can review the letter "[Iuvenescit Ecclesia](#)" written to the Bishops of the Catholic Church by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in 2016.

## Week of 10/30

**Q: I recently watched a debate between a catholic and Protestant. In the debate the Protestant made the claim that Nicaea 2, Florence, and Trent all had different canon lists and so therefore they can't be**

**considered infallible councils because they disagree. My first question is, is it true that they did have different canon lists? And my second question would be, can an ecumenical council err in any capacity?**

A: Let's start with some basics about ecumenical councils and the documents they produced. Historically, ecumenical councils have been convened to discuss and resolve specific issues confronting the Church at that period in history. For example:

- Nicaea II (7<sup>th</sup> council, 787) condemned iconoclasm (which was mainly confined to the East), a heresy that held that the use of images constituted idolatry; condemned Adoptionism, which held that Christ was not the Son of God by nature but only by adoption, thereby denying the hypostatic union.
- Florence (17<sup>th</sup> council, 1438-1443) reaffirmed papal primacy against claims of conciliarists that an ecumenical council is superior to a pope and approved reunion with several Eastern Churches, but the reunion was only temporary.
- Trent (19<sup>th</sup> council, 1545-1549, 1551-1552, 1562-1563) affirmed Catholic doctrines against the errors of the Protestant Reformers; reaffirmed teachings on the role of the Bible and Tradition, grace, sin, justification by faith (but not by "faith alone"), the Mass as a real sacrifice, purgatory, indulgences, jurisdiction of the pope; initiated the Counter-Reformation; reformed the clergy and morals; promoted religious instruction; and ordered the establishment of seminaries for the future training of priests.

As a result of the differences in their focus they will naturally produce documents/declarations that contain different content and canons (ecclesiastical norms issued by the Church through the collective voice of the bishops gathered in ecumenical or local synods, speaking through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and in agreement with Christ's teaching and the dogmas of the Church) that address different elements of the Catholic faith. To expect canons to be the same from council to council is to fail to understand the nature of Church councils.

In addition, not every document issued by an ecumenical council contains infallible teachings of the Church. As a matter of fact, through the course of history the majority of the writings issued by ecumenical councils have not been infallible teaching documents. Where there are infallible declarations on faith and morals made, they are clearly defined as such using highly specific language and formats (e.g., Trent made many such declarations in response to the heresies promoted by the Protestant revolution). Hence, the fact that the canons defined from one council to the next are different is irrelevant. A problem would exist if one council made an infallible declaration and another one issued a declaration that conflicted with it. To my knowledge there is no evidence that this has ever occurred, and I would challenge anyone making this claim to provide the specific councils and canons that they believe are in conflict.

This brief [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers summarizes the councils if you are interested. In addition, this [TRANSCRIPT](#) of a recent Catholic Answers Focus Podcast provides a nice look at councils – what they do and don't do, where their authority comes from, the relationships between councils and papal authority, etc...

I hope that helps. If you have an example of a claim that there were conflicting infallible teachings issued by ecumenical councils, I would love to respond to that.

**Q: I have a question about marriage vows. If a couple marries in the Catholic church and one spouse did not intend to keep their vows, is the marriage invalid? I know that this is one of the possible grounds for annulment, but if the spouse who did not intend to remain faithful has a change of heart and the couple wants to stay together, is there anything they need to do to validate their marriage in the Church? Thank you for your help.**

A: It is an unusual one and I am glad you submitted it. You are correct in stating that if one or both of the parties attempted marriage with the intent to be unfaithful that would be grounds for declaring an attempted marriage invalid in the eyes of the Church. Marital consent is a fundamental element of the sacrament of matrimony. It refers to the free and deliberate act by which a man and a woman give themselves to each other to establish a marriage covenant. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) provides insight into what is included in marital consent:

"The consent consists in a 'human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other': 'I take you to be my wife'—'I take you to be my husband.' This consent that **binds the spouses to each other** finds its fulfillment in the two 'becoming one flesh'" ([CCC 1627](#)).

Marital consent involves the mutual and voluntary exchange of words or vows between the bride and groom. It is a personal commitment to enter a lifelong partnership of love and **fidelity**. The consent should be a conscious and deliberate act, free from coercion or external pressure. It should be based on a genuine understanding of the nature and responsibilities of marriage, including its permanence, **exclusivity**, and openness to the procreation and education of children. [Canon Law](#) has a fair amount of detail regarding marital consent in [Canons 1095-1107](#).

Canon Law also provides guidance regarding having a marriage convalidated (most think of this as renewing one's vows) if an impediment existed at the point a marriage was attempted in [Canons 1156-1160](#). Canon 1159 specifically states, "A marriage which is invalid because of a defect of consent is convalidated if the party who did not consent now consents, provided that the consent given by the other party perseveres."

All that said, the Church does presume a marriage is valid until it is proven otherwise. So, while the spouse that was aware of the defect of consent may believe the marriage is invalid, the Church would not assume this unless one of the spouses pursued a declaration of nullity and that failure in consent was proven. If, in this case, both parties are aware of the impediment to consent, I would suggest they approach their local pastor and seek a convalidation (it is a very simple process). If only one party is aware of the issue that could make it a bit trickier as disclosing this issue could create a damaging rift. In that case, it would be worthwhile for the knowing party to discuss options with their pastor and get some advice regarding how to best proceed to have the marriage convalidated.

**Q: Have just read that the Pope now is saying it is ok to bless same sex relationships (I cannot and will not say marriage when referring to gays since there is no such thing). My questions is this: I know the Greek Orthodox church has a valid priesthood. Besides the schism between it and us being the denial of the Pope(s) legitimacy, what are the other issues. I know we Catholics can receive communion, but**



that church doesn't like or allow us to do so? I heard on Catholic Answers that even though we can receive there, marriages and confessions are not valid. Not totally sure I heard this correctly. Is this the case and why? I'm seriously considering leaving the Catholic Church and going to the Greek Orthodox one in my area. I'm sick about what this Pope has done and is doing. I don't know how any faithful Catholic who truly knows what the Church teaches can stay. Worse than that, was it BS from the very beginning? Because it means all the infallible, dogmatic and authoritative teachings of the Church for the past 2000+ years were wrong. They can be changed. As far as I'm concerned, he is a heretic, a wolf in sheep's clothing and one of those evil men Christ said would be in His church. Christ said the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Guess what. Looks like they have. How did it ever get this far? Hate to sound so doomsday, but I'm honestly thinking this may be the end of the road for us.

A: I am student of Catholic History and have spent a considerable amount of time focusing on the 267 men who have served as pope over the last 2,000 years. My first thought is you might benefit from taking a broader look at Church history. The Catholic Church has seen far worse times than the one in which we are currently living. As a matter of fact, compared to the first seven centuries, the period from about AD 900-1200 and then again AD 1450-1550, we aren't seeing anything close to the type of doctrinal crisis the Church has been faced with in the past.

My second thought is far too many people are making assumptions and reading into what our pope is saying and not enough time reading his official statements and the official documents coming from Vatican offices. After all, it is only the pope's official statements that carry any weight for the Catholic faithful. For example, the Pope's response to the recent dubia submitted by German Cardinal Walter Brandmüller, American Cardinal Raymond Burke, Chinese Cardinal Zen Ze-Kiun, Mexican Cardinal Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, and Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah (you can find the response to all five dubia questions [HERE](#) in its entirety) made his position on same sex marriage very clear. When asked if it would be possible to bless same sex unions the pope's response was:

*a) The Church has a very clear conception of marriage: an exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the begetting of children. It calls this union "marriage." Other forms of union only realize it "in a partial and analogous way" (Amoris Laetitia, 292), and so they cannot be strictly called "marriage."*

*b) It is not a mere question of names, but the reality that we call marriage has a unique essential constitution that demands an exclusive name, not applicable to other realities. It is undoubtedly much more than a mere "ideal."*

*c) For this reason the Church avoids any kind of rite or sacramental that could contradict this conviction and give the impression that something that is not marriage is recognized as marriage.*

The pope's response did go on to say that people engaged in same sex relationship could not be automatically denied any type of blessing. For example, two people who are trying to live according to the Church's teaching on chastity could be offered a blessing that is focused on God giving them the strength they need to overcome their concupiscence and live according to God's law.

Unfortunately, many distorted the pope's response to read into it what they wanted to hear and hence you can read many of the internet commentators claiming he said something that he did not actually say. Unfortunately, Pope Francis is the first pope of the social media age and everything he says is instantly commented on (and often twisted) to satisfy the desires of the commentator. In the Pope's desire to be pastoral and present the "both / and" reality of Catholic teaching, he often leaves room in his statements for those on all sides of issues to read into his proclamations what they want him to say. This is the real challenge with the Francis papacy, and it will be a challenge for all popes moving forward in this modern age of communication. I am sure all previous popes are thanking the Lord that they were not subjected to this communications nightmare as prior popes only had to concern themselves with what was contained within their official documents.

That said, I always challenge those that believe that Francis is contradicting Church doctrine (Dogma, Infallible Doctrine or Mutable Doctrine) to produce one of his official pronouncements doing so. No one has been able to meet that challenge to date. Having read every official document issued by this pope or issued under his authority (e.g., the 2022 statement from the Vatican criticizing the German Synodal Way that you can read about [HERE](#)), I can guarantee you that Francis has always been quite clear that the Church has no ability to change what has been divinely revealed as truth. You see another example of that just this week with regards to the ordination of women where Francis once again reiterated (see this [ARTICLE](#)) the infallible teaching promulgated by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1994 in [ORDINATIO SACERDOTALIS](#) that ordination is reserved for men. The bottom line is that Francis has not once issued anything conflicting with Catholic Dogma (divinely revealed truth), Infallible Doctrine (unchangeable truths most often related to Dogma) or even Mutable Doctrine (doctrine that can change and which the Pope could unilaterally change if he felt it was necessary to correct an error). Francis has also reiterated the long-accepted teachings of Saint Vincent of Lerins and Cardinal Saint John Henry Newman regarding doctrinal development. That teaching clearly states that Dogma and Infallible Doctrine simply cannot change in their essence (e.g., a cat cannot become a dog, but a dog can grow longer hair) but that we can and should come to a fuller understanding of the truths they contain as we progress.

If you truly believe that the gates of hell are prevailing against the Church that would mean you are questioning Christ's promise in [Matthew 16:18](#), [John 16:13](#), etc... If you are questioning Christ's promise you would also have to be questioning his divinity and I doubt you are doing that. Unfortunately, there are far too many media outlets (and Catholics eager to press a point – both clergy and laity) that are generating clicks and reads by sensationalizing Francis' every word and choosing to selectively (and not so selectively in many cases) ignore his official statements.

As for the Orthodox Church, our differences are not nearly as great as some would have you believe as language, culture and politics were more at the heart of the original divide than any doctrinal conflicts. However, there are several material differences such as the role of the pope and theological positions on salvation and the sacraments that present a challenge. One of those sacramental differences which may make you think twice about the Orthodox is their position on the allowability of divorce which is in direct contradiction to Catholic teaching and the words of Christ himself. The bottom line with the Orthodox is they have found it impossible to come to agreement between the various segments of orthodoxy. For all intents and purposes

there is no longer one Orthodox Church but several independent Churches that claim Orthodox origins who are no longer in communion with each other. This, more than doctrinal differences, has made it impossible for Church unification discussions to proceed in the last few decades.

On a final note, people are far too quick to throw around terms such as heretic, schismatic, and apostate these days. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us in [CCC 2089](#), for someone to be a heretic they must be in, "...obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith or.....is likewise (in) an obstinate doubt concerning the same." That same paragraph from the Catechism defines apostasy, schism and incredulity (which is something many Catholics suffer from). I am sure when you read those definitions you will find that none of them apply to our pope and that those in media that bantey those terms around actually have no idea what the terms mean and are demonstrating an ignorance of Catholic teaching.

My advice to you is simple:

1. Trust that Christ is God and that his promises are true. His Church will not fail and the Holy Spirit continues to guide it to truth.
2. Be careful about what you read and hear through modern media and question everything regardless of the source. All humans are broken, and all have an agenda they are promoting (consciously or not).
3. Make sure when it comes to our pope or the Magisterium as a whole, that you are reading official proclamations and not merely accepting the interpretation of those proclamations from any one of the thousands of commentators that are eager to put their spin on them.
4. Remember that in 2,000 years we have had many instances when the Church was actually in danger of collapse (this is certainly not one of them) and that God has always provided a champion (e.g., Athanasius, Francis, Dominic, Catherine of Sienna, etc...) that more often than not rises from the laity. If we do need a champion in the future God will provide one.
5. Remember that Christ established one Church – the Catholic Church – and that knowingly and freely abandoning Christ's Church is abandoning Christ. Don't abandon Christ because you fear there is another Judas.

I realize this may not have been the type of advice you were hoping for. While I am not a huge fan of the methods that Francis sometimes employs (he seems to be a big fan of the advice to "keep your friends close and your enemies even closer") he has not once wavered on defending universal Church teaching. Pope Francis is one that seems to favor bringing those in error to the truth by allowing them to engage in public debate so the error of their ways can be highlighted. Unfortunately, this is very uncomfortable for most and allows detractors to claim that Francis does this because he agrees with those to whom he gives a voice. I believe that as Catholics we owe our allegiance to the pope and until he issues an official statement contradicting Church teaching, he will continue to have mine.

**Q: In a baptism in the Baptist faith, can the trinitarian words of the form be completely said just prior to the immersion or do they have to be said during the immersion in order for the baptism to be valid?**

A: Thanks for the question. This is an interesting one. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." ([CCC 1278](#)) Using the form and matter in separate places or at different times would not be in accordance with the Church's understanding of the sacrament. The unity of the form and matter signifies the unity of the sacramental action and the invocation of the Holy Trinity.

The Catholic Church recognizes baptisms performed by other Christian communities that are administered with water and the Trinitarian formula 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' and that are recognized as valid by the community to which the baptized person belongs. This means that if a person has been baptized in another Christian denomination using water and the Trinitarian formula, and that denomination recognizes the baptism as valid, the Catholic Church acknowledges the validity of that baptism. See [Canon Law – Canon 869](#) for more on this.

In your scenario there is not a significant gap between expressing the proper form and employing the proper matter. At the same time, the Church does recognize Baptist baptisms performed according to their norms. Therefore, while it is not ideal that there was a separation of the form and matter, if we assume that the Baptism was performed within the norms of the Baptist community it is a valid Baptism. If the norms of the Baptist community also require that the form and matter, be employed simultaneously then there would be a problem.

## Week of 10/23

**Q: Why can a Protestant be considered a Christian witness for a Catholic Baptism but a Catholic who has not received confirmation not be considered a Christian witness at a baptism?**

A: There seems to be a misunderstanding here. There is nothing that would prevent a non-Confirmed but Baptized Catholic from serving as a Christian witness at a Baptism. A Baptized, but not fully initiated Catholic could NOT serve as a Sponsor / Godparent, but they could serve as a witness assuming a fully qualified Sponsor / Godparent is present (same as is required for a non-Catholic Christian serving as a witness). The [Code of Canon Law](#) lays out the responsibilities and requirements for sponsors / godparents and witnesses in [Canons 872, 873, & 874](#).

While a sponsor / godparent is not required for a valid and licit Baptism if one is selected he / she (if two are selected one must be male and one must be female) must be: 1) at least 16 years of age, 2) a confirmed Catholic who actively practices the faith, 3) under no canonical penalty, and 4) must not be a parent of the one to be baptized. If there is a sponsor / godparent selected that meet these requirements a second Baptized Christian (Catholic or not) can serve as a Christian witness assuming they are the opposite sex of the qualified Sponsor / Godparent.

Remember, that there is a significant responsibility difference between someone serving as a Sponsor / Godparent who is required to help the baptized person to lead a Christian life and the

ceremonial position of witness who has no formal responsibilities with regards to the faith journey of the individual being Baptized.

**Q: Today in Catechism in a Year, Father Mike covered how abortion incurs an automatic excommunication, but he also pleaded with anyone in that situation to go to Confession. Does the average priest hearing confessions have the authority to undo excommunication? Wouldn't this require recognition from the Pope, or at least the local Bishop?**

A: Father Mike is correct. According to the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), “Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life. A person who procures a completed abortion incurs excommunication ‘latae sententiae,’ by the very commission of the offense, and subject to the conditions provided by Canon Law. The Church does not thereby intend to restrict the scope of mercy. Rather, she makes clear the gravity of the crime committed, the irreparable harm done to the innocent who is put to death, as well as to the parents and the whole of society.” ([CCC 2272](#))

Pope Francis indefinitely extended the faculty to forgive the sin of abortion and lift the automation excommunication that comes with formal cooperation in this sin to all priests on November 20, 2016, in his Apostolic Letter, “[Misericordia et misera](#).” This followed the Jubilee year in which Francis had temporarily granted this authority to all priests. As a result, any priest with faculties to hear a confession is capable of offering Christ's forgiveness / absolution for the sin or abortion or direct formal cooperation with an abortion (e.g., someone who drove another for the purpose of them getting an abortion) thereby lifting that excommunication. There are only a handful of excommunicable offenses, and these do require that a Bishop and / or the Pope remove the excommunication in almost every cases outside of this and other documented exceptions. (See more in [CCC 1463](#))

**Q: The US is currently following the order of separation of Church and State. I've heard in mass that HFC offers peaceful prayers at adoptions clinics and pray for alternatives to abortion. Just curious on the level of involment of the Catholic Church to encourage for Godly laws (what God teaches us) to be placed into social laws (what we as a society adopt)? For example, I recall in class, on 10/15/23, that the Catholic teachings do not support that women didn't/don't have the right to vote, and not sure how the Catholic Church got involved to try to remedy this. What about during slavery? Or when Eugenic policies were enacted? Etc.**

A: One thing that people often get wrong about “separation of Church and State” in the US Constitution is that the Constitution does not call for a separation of Church and State. The first clause in the Bill of Rights, known as the establishment clause, states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” The original intent was to prevent the Government from defining a national religion so that all religions could be freely practiced – one of the reasons that people came to the new world in the first place. There is nowhere in the constitution that states Church and State must be separated – that is an interpretation that grew and expanded over time that would have likely confounded our founding fathers who based much of the nations founding structure on Christian belief.

That said, your question is timely as this Sunday's Gospel reading comes from Matthew 22:15-21 and refers to "...repay(ing) to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." In other words, Jesus is teaching us to support our government officials who have been put in authority over us to ensure justice up to the point in which they demand something that conflicts with God's teaching. We live in the secular world and must respect secular authorities as long as we do not compromise what we owe to God as members of his Kingdom. This teaching is clearly laid out in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraph 2242 that states:

*"The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the Gospel. Refusing obedience to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience, finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community. 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. We must obey God rather than men': When citizens are under the oppression of a public authority which oversteps its competence, they should still not refuse to give or to do what is objectively demanded of them by the common good; but it is legitimate for them to defend their own rights and those of their fellow citizens against the abuse of this authority within the limits of the natural law and the Law of the Gospel.*

So the Church will engage in political discourse if and when the government in the US or anywhere in the world defines a law or enforces a policy that is opposed to the truths of God's revelation and plan for human dignity. While we are citizens of the country in which we live and must abide by the laws of the land we are members of God's kingdom first and when the laws of the land conflict with the laws of God's kingdom, God's laws must not be compromised. As a result, Faithful Catholics are called to peacefully against unjust laws and refuse to comply with them when they compromise our faith. This is the approach the Church has always taken and always will. This is why Catholics can not be neatly packed into one political party or another as our faith compels to both support and refute positions of both major political parties in the US. This is why we are called not to vote for a party but for individual candidates based upon the alignment of their positions with Catholic teaching.

**Q: Does the Church consider married Catholics to become single when their spouse dies? Assuming both spouses make it to Heaven, will they be considered married once they are reunited?**

A: The marital bond is severed by the death of one of the spouses and the surviving spouse is free to marry again if she/he chooses. Once married you are always married. While in one sense you would be single when your spouse dies (and free to marry again), you would more appropriately be considered a widow or widower.

As for marriage in heaven Jesus himself taught us, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" ([Matthew 22:30](#)) If you examine this passage in its entirety ([Matthew 22:23-33](#)) you will find that Jesus is teaching us that married couples will no longer need marriage as we know it on earth. On earth, marriage is a gift, where spouses can serve each other and help each other reach heaven. Once in heaven, this need goes away.

In heaven, the relationship between spouses is believed to be transformed and elevated, but the Church does not teach that the sacrament of marriage continues in the same way as it did on earth. Drawing upon Jesus' teaching, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "in the resurrection, the state of the blessed will be a communication of divine life, without end, in communion with Christ and with all the redeemed" ([CCC 1023](#)). In heaven, the primary focus is on our union with God and the communion of saints, rather than on earthly relationships.

The Church does affirm that the love and bond shared by spouses on earth can have lasting effects and implications in heaven. In heaven, the love and unity experienced in marriage may be fulfilled and perfected in a way that transcends our earthly understanding.

**Q: In the last class you mentioned Priest are allowed to get married, you mentioned two types denominations of Catholics... I'm confused only because I grew up being told they are not allowed to get married that they are solely married to the church.**

A: There are 24 different Rites in the Catholic Church. The Latin Rite – the one you likely grew up in - is only one of them. While all 24 are Catholic and we all share the same doctrinal beliefs they do have different laws and practices. The practice in the Latin Rite is for priests to remain celibate and unmarried. However, for most of the Eastern Catholic Churches (who are in full communion with the Pope) the practice has generally been that Priests may be married although Bishops may not. Even in the Latin Rite priestly celibacy is only a practice not a doctrine. This means the practice can change. This practice in the Latin Rite has changed over the course of our 2,000-year history and it could change again. (see this brief article for more on Married Eastern Rite priests - <https://www.catholic.com/qa/why-are-eastern-rite-married-men-allowed-to-be-ordained-priests> )

Despite the fact that the current practice in the Latin Rite is for priests to remain celibate there are married Latin Rite priests. Pope Saint John Paul II began allowing married priests from specific protestant denominations (e.g., Anglican Church) to become Latin Rite Catholic priests when they convert to Catholicism. These men must complete Catholic seminary training, but once they do they are ordained as Catholic Priests and serve in Latin Rite diocese around the world. It is a very small but growing number at this point. The reason this is allowed is because priestly celibacy is not a doctrine of the Church but a practice.

The bottom line is don't be surprised if you find a married priest with kids in a Latin Rite Church.

**Q: Regarding John 6:68 and the Bread of life Discourse. Simon says where shall we go, You have the words of eternal life. My issue is: does the "words" Simon Peter is referring to, the teachings of Jesus. And could the bread of life discourse be that Jesus' teaching/word is the bread of life? Since in v63 Jesus says "the words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life" and also v63 "It is the Spirit that gives life" If "word spoken" = spirit = life And bread = life Then; bread = words/teaching of Jesus? Would this be correct to assume the bread of life is the teachings of Jesus? Can the Bread of Life Discourse be both the literal body of Jesus Christ (Eucharist) and also the figurative words of Jesus Christ that we must abide in for salvation. Please help me clarify the meaning of John 6:68.**

A: Peter is clearly stating that Jesus's teachings (his Word) are the key to attaining eternal life in [John 6:68](#). The teaching on the Eucharist found in the Bread of Life Discourse ([John 6:22-69](#)) is certainly part of that body of teachings that Peter is referencing.

While there is no official Church position on [John 6:63](#), when Jesus says, "It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life;" most Catholic commentators will make the case that what Jesus is saying here is that you must have faith to believe what he is teaching (especially about the Eucharist) and that our physical senses alone (what we can perceive through our flesh) will not allow us to understand how this teaching is possible. Put another way, what we are capable of perceiving in the material world will always fall short of allowing us to understand the fullness of truth. We need God's grace and the faith that comes through our acceptance of that grace to come to an understanding of that truth.

We see a parallel to this in the Gospel of Matthew after Peter exclaims, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Matthew 16:16](#)), when Jesus asks his Disciples who they think he is. Jesus replies to Simon, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." ([Matthew 16:17](#)) Once again Jesus is making it clear that the only way one can grasp the fullness of the truth is through the faith that comes by accepting God's grace.

In a sense, all of Jesus' teachings on faith and morals are indeed "bread of life" as our ingestion of / belief in them is essential for our spiritual salvation. So, from that perspective I would say your intuition is correct about the dual meaning of the Bread of Life Discourse.

**Q: Where in the Bible can the 7 capital sins be found?**

A: The seven "capital" or "deadly" sins do not appear as a list in the Bible. Each of them – Pride, Avarice/Greed, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy & Sloth – are spoken about as being sinful in the Bible (in multiple locations), but their collection into a single list is extrabiblical. One tradition (there are several) has them first being compiled by Pope Gregory I, who in 600 A.D., compiled a list of 7 "capital" sins and their opposing virtues – Humility, Generosity, Chastity, Meekness, Temperance, Brotherly Love, & Diligence. They became very popular lists of religious do's and don'ts.

Below I provide two locations in the Bible where each of them is spoken of, but they all appear in multiple places (too many to list):

Pride: Proverbs 16:18, James 4:6

Greed: Proverbs 28:25, 1 Timothy 6:10

Lust: Proverbs 6:25, Matthew 5:28

Anger: Proverbs 14:29, James 1:19-20

Gluttony: Proverbs 23:20-21, Romans 13:14

Envy: Proverbs 14:30, James 3:16

Sloth: Proverbs 13:4, 2 Thessalonians 3:10



## Week of 10/16

**Q: Any thoughts on Jehovah's Witnesses interpretation of "Be no part of this world". They say that Jesus was implying to never be involved with politics. Also, Is there a way to refute JW's claim that Jesus is Michael the Arc Angel and their claim that Jesus is not God using their own bible translation (NWT)? They seem to do a good job in their translation covering up any hints of Christ being God.**

A: Thanks for the questions. Lets start with the passage in John's Gospel where you find the verses pertaining to remaining separate from the world - [John 17:11-19](#):

*"And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because **they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world**. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. **They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world**. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth."*

Jehovah's Witnesses will often use this passage to justify refusing to serve in any nation's armed forces, holding public office, voting, or even saluting a flag. However, Jesus is simply stating that his disciples have not been corrupted by the material excesses and surrender to one's passions that plague mankind. Jesus' disciples are holy (set apart) living in this world but not corrupted by it. This passage says nothing about refusal to participate in the society in which one lives and / or supporting its just governance.

In [Mark 12:13-17](#) Jesus faced a hostile audience eager to trip him up with a question that would expose him to scorn. As a teacher of all that is "true," would he pay taxes to Caesar? He asked for a coin and contemplated what was engraved upon it. He saw the image of Caesar and answered, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." The immediate impact of the statement is that money comes from the system the government has set up and so we should pay the tribute that government then demands. Jesus is making it clear that there is a place for the government. It has a rightful task and a duty it should fulfill and that we have a duty to support the government of the land in which we live right up to the point in which that support conflicts with our duty to God and neighbor. We can see evidence of this teaching in [Acts 10](#), where the centurion Cornelius was converted but not asked to stop serving in the military. Likewise in [Luke 3:12-14](#) when the tax collectors and soldiers come to Jesus asking him what they need to do to be saved he simply replies that they must deal fairly with others – Jesus does not asked them to quit. Clearly Jesus did not teach we must remain separate from and withhold our support for the country in which we live.

As for demonstrating that Jesus is not the archangel Michale using the NWT bible is not quite as simple as the NWT goes out of its way to scrub direct references to Jesus as God. That said,

there are simply too many of those references for them to succeed. There are a number of simple points you can make. Here are a few:

1. Two of the verses that the Jehovah's are most famous for "scrubbing" are [John 1:1](#) and [John 8:58](#). The NWT renders these verses differently than almost every other translation. The problem the Jehovah's have is that in changing the translation they most often do so inconsistently. For example, in John 1:1 they insert the "a" before the word God, while just a few verses later in [John 1:5](#) they leave the "a" out despite the exact same language and syntax being used. We find the same thing in John 8:58 translating what professional translators have translated as "I AM" as "I have been". Yet just a short while later in [John 10:9](#) they translate the same words as "I am." The NWT is full of these inconsistencies in translation where the Jehovah translators vary the translation to fit their theology when it suits them and then adopt the standard translation when it does not seem to conflict with their stated beliefs.
2. Have them take a look at [John 20:28](#) where Thomas is speaking to Jesus and very clearly identifies Jesus as "My Lord and My God."
3. The NWT could not scrub out the many occasions where Jesus forgave the sins of those he healed (e.g., [Mark 2:1-12](#)). The ability to forgive sins belongs to God and God alone. This is why the Jewish authorities accused Jesus of blasphemy – he was claiming authority that only the one true God possessed. You can see another example of Jesus exercising this type of authority – the authority of God - when he repeatedly says, "You have heard is said..." in [Matthew 5:21-48](#).
4. Finally, throw this one at them.... The Bible indicates that God alone created the universe ([Isaiah 44:24](#)), and "he that constructed all things is God" ([Hebrews 3:4](#)). However, Jesus created the heavens and the earth ([Hebrews 1:10](#)). This passage by itself proves that Jesus is God, since an Old Testament reference to God ([Psalm 102:26-28](#)) is now given to him.

One last thing...Engaging Jehovah's in biblical debates will likely not prove fruitful. Most Jehovah's have had several dozen verses drilled into them and they are prepared to respond to most arguments that challenge their doctrines. The key is to go a step farther back and challenge the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society's ability to serve as God's authority on earth. Ask them to explain how the Catholic Church lost that authority clearly given to Peter and the Apostles in Mathew 16 and 18 and how this authority was given to the leaders of the Jehovah's 1800 years later. What event or sign was given that would indicate that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was given this power by God. You may want to mention that their numerous failed prophecies like their prediction of the end of times (1914, 1915, 1925, 1975) or their prediction that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would return would seem to indicate that they do not actually have any insights coming directly from God. The fact that they built the mansion in San Diego, Beth Sarim, to house the three returning patriarchs and that their second leader, Rutherford, chose to live in this mansion until his death in 1942 certainly throws some serious doubt on their credibility.

**Q: What is the purpose of praying to saints? How do you pray to saints?**

A: The purpose of praying to saints in the Catholic tradition is to seek their intercession and ask for their prayers on our behalf. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) explains the practice of praying to saints in the context of the communion of saints, which is the spiritual unity of all the members of the Church, both those on earth and those who have died and are in heaven ([CCC 946-948](#)).

Catholics believe that the saints, who have lived holy lives and are now in the presence of God, can intercede for us and bring our prayers before God. They are seen as powerful intercessors and friends in heaven who can assist us on our journey of faith. The Catechism states, "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness... They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus" ([CCC 956](#)). Praying to saints is a personal and devotional practice within the Catholic faith, and it is not obligatory. It is a way for individuals to deepen their relationship with God and seek the support and intercession of those who have gone before us in faith.

It is important to note that Catholic teaching distinguishes between the worship due to God alone (latria) and the honor and veneration given to the saints (dulia). Catholics do not worship saints, but rather honor them as holy men and women who have been united with God in heaven. The veneration of saints is seen as a way to express gratitude for their example of faith and to seek their help and prayers.

Praying for a Saint to intercede for you or someone you love is as simple as asking the saint for her/his help. There are no special rules. As in all prayer, it should be approached the same way you would approach a conversation with a friend.

**Q: When completing first communion I know that I will receive Christ for the first time but will I receive the sacramental wine as well? Will we be given an individual cup for wine to take or will I drink from a cup that everyone is drinking from? I guess I find it a bit unsanitary drinking from a cup that strangers are drinking from.**

A: The reception of the Eucharist (Communion) under both species, that is, receiving both the consecrated bread (the Body of Christ) and the consecrated wine (the Blood of Christ), is a practice that is allowed and encouraged in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church teaches that the Eucharist is the sacrament in which the bread and wine are consecrated and become the true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Catechism states, "The Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life.' 'The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it'" ([CCC 1324](#)).

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the priest consecrates both the bread and the wine, following the example of Jesus at the Last Supper. The Church teaches that Christ is fully present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, under each species. Therefore, receiving either the consecrated bread or the consecrated wine is sufficient to receive the whole Christ. However, the practice of receiving the Eucharist under both species is seen as a fuller expression of the sacrament. It allows the faithful to participate more fully in the mystery of the Eucharist and to symbolically partake in the complete offering of Christ's body and blood – see [CCC 1390](#).

The decision to offer the Eucharist under both species is determined by the local bishop or the norms established by the Episcopal Conference (e.g., The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). In some situations, such as large Masses or special liturgical celebrations, the distribution of the Eucharist under both species may not be practical or logistically feasible. In such cases, receiving the Eucharist under one species (usually the consecrated bread) is still considered a complete and valid reception of the sacrament.

The bottom line is that you do not have to receive the consecrated wine to have full reception of the Eucharist. At the same time, unless the Bishop permits it, the distribution of the Eucharist through the wine is not possible. Even if the consecrated wine is available, you are not required to receive it. Many feel the same as you do that with so many people sharing the same cup an unsanitary condition is created. So, even if the distribution of the Sacred Blood is allowed you have nothing to worry about as you have no obligation to receive the Eucharist under that species.

**Q: What is Frankincense used for during Church?**

A: Incense is used in the Catholic Church as an expression of reverence and prayer. It is a way to signify the importance of the moment and to create a sacred atmosphere during the liturgy. The use of incense is rooted in Sacred Scripture, particularly in the Psalms (e.g., [Psalm 141:1-2](#)) and the Book of Revelation (e.g., [Revelation 5:8](#), [Revelation 8:3-5](#)). The offering of incense is seen as a form of worship and sacrifice, pleasing to God. It is a way to lift up prayers to God, symbolizing the prayers of the faithful rising like incense before Him. The use of incense is also a way to honor and venerate the Most Blessed Sacrament, relics of the Holy Cross, images of the Lord, and relics and images of the Saints.

Incense is used during various parts of the Mass, including the Entrance procession, the beginning of Mass, the Gospel procession, the consecration, and the showing of the host and chalice. The priest blesses the incense with the sign of the Cross before using it, and a profound bow is made before and after incensing, except for the incensation of the altar and the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass.

The specific number of swings of the thurible depends on what is being incensed, with three swings for the Most Blessed Sacrament, relics of the Holy Cross, images of the Lord, the offerings for the sacrifice of the Mass, the altar cross, the Book of the Gospels, the Paschal Candle, the priest, and the people. Relics and images of the Saints are incensed with two swings, and the altar is incensed with single swings, either by walking around it or by walking to the right and then to the left, depending on its position.

The most common ingredient used in Catholic incense is frankincense although myrrh, a frankincense / myrrh blend, or even copal resin may be used as well. Other ingredients may sometimes be added to provide the incense with a distinctive odor that is important in the cultural setting.

You can learn more about the use of incense during mass by examining the [General Instructions for the Roman Missal \(GIRM\)](#) chapter four, paragraphs 276-277.

**Q: In Mass are we supposed to hold our hands together in prayer?**

A: There are very few required / mandatory postures or hand movements that the assembly must assume in Mass. The General Instruction for the Roman Missal (GIRM) specifies if posture / position is required. Most requirements are directed at the Celebrant and Liturgical Ministers supporting the Celebrant. As long as your position is one of reverence and not of offense, you are free to do what you feel most comfortable doing except for those mandatory movement of standing (e.g., for the proclamation of the Gospel) and kneeling (e.g., during the Eucharistic prayer). That said, if you are physically unable to assume a required posture you are not required to attempt to do so.

**Q: Why are the Spanish Mass and English Mass different in terms of what people do? Example – open their hands to say, “And with your Spirit.”**

A: There are a wide variety of minor differences in how the Mass is celebrated across cultures and even from parish to parish. The Church has always allowed minor variations / practices as long as they do not conflict with or inhibit required practice or create an unnecessary distraction if the community find the practice helps them come closer to God during the celebration. If you travel around our very own Diocese of Orange, you will find small variations in practice across all 60 parishes. If you travel from one diocese to the next you may find even more. Once you go from one country to the next the differences can seem quite large. That said, the core elements of the Mass are indeed the same everywhere in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. The differences you see are additions to the core or variations in the responses (physical and / or verbal) provided by the assembly. The Church has always embraced cultural differences as long as they can be demonstrated to be aligned with Church teaching and effective in bringing the members of that cultural closer to our God as we celebrate the Mass.

**Q: Did St. Irenaeus really believe Jesus died at the age of 50? I hear people sometimes use that argument to try to undermine apostolic tradition.**

A: Thanks for the question. It is the first time I have gotten one on this topic. It is sometimes claimed that Irenaeus believed Christ did not die until he was older than is conventionally portrayed. You can find this in his work [Adversus Haereses](#) (Book II, chapter 22) where Irenaeus is making an argument against the Gnostic claim that Jesus ministered only one year after his Baptism and died at age thirty. Irenaeus is demonstrating that this claim is absurd and may be wildly so. In paragraph 6 of the document referenced above Irenaeus uses John 8:57 to propose that Jesus was likely closer to 50 than 30. It is a logical argument designed to prove that the Gnostics were wrong and that Jesus did not die at age 30. Whether or not Irenaeus actually believed that Jesus died closer to 50 than 30 is another matter altogether. Irenaeus clearly believed that Jesus’ ministry lasted more than one year and that was the point he was making with this argument and the other illustrations / arguments found in *Adversus Haereses*.

All that said... whether Irenaeus believed Jesus was closer to 50 than 30 when he died is irrelevant when it comes to the Catholic belief that the Word of God is found in the combination of Sacred Scripture (God’s written Word) and Apostolic / Holy Tradition (God’s oral Word passed from Jesus to the Apostles and subsequently to their successors- the bishops). The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) provides a very clear description of the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition, along with the role the Magisterium plays in safeguarding the deposit of faith in [CCC 74-100](#). CCC 74 contains a key statement reminding us that the Word of

God contains, "...the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples..." This is why Irenaeus's argument for the age of Jesus is irrelevant to whether Apostolic Tradition exists – Apostolic Tradition refers to the elements of the deposit of faith passed on orally that instruct / guide us in matters of faith and morals; helping us live as intentional disciples of Christ. Christ's age is no more relevant to that deposit than the age of any of the Apostles. Having that knowledge has no bearing on what we believe.

The Church Fathers believed in a wide variety of things about many subjects. While they agreed on most topics related to faith and morals, they differed on a meaningful number of things even in that arena. That said, even though some of the Fathers were members of the Magisterium as bishops of the Church, it is only the pope or the bishops in communion with the pope acting together (and with the pope's ultimate approval) that define doctrine for the universal Church and hence define what is and is not part of Apostolic Tradition. We recognize the importance of the individual Fathers as well as their collective wisdom, but they are not a second magisterium and hence are quite capable of making errors even in the areas of faith and morals.

The bottom line is that saying that Irenaeus's belief about Jesus' age at death was wrong (and we cannot tell for sure what he actually thought the age was) is proof that the belief in Apostolic succession is invalid is ludicrous. The premise is invalid as there is no logical or causal connection between the premise and the conclusion. It would be like me saying that because Peter believed the world was flat we can invalidate the words of God he helped capture and transmit. The Holy Spirit only protects the Magisterium (does nothing for the Church Fathers) from corrupting the Tradition passed on orally relative to faith and morals.

## Week of 10/09

**Q: What does God look for in our lives in order to be saved? Do our actions on earth dictate our outcome or what we deeply believe in? Or is it our personal relationship with the Lord? I know this is all subjugation to time, given we have up into the moments of our death to repent; can we truly be saved if we can sin simply by a bad thought?**

A: To receive salvation, one must have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior. Faith is the beginning of salvation and the response to God's invitation to enter into a loving relationship with Him. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) affirms, "Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation" ([CCC 161](#)). However, faith alone is not sufficient for salvation in Catholic teaching. Good works, inspired by faith and empowered by God's grace, are also necessary. The Catechism states, "The charity of Christ is the source in us of all our merits before God. Grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and before men" ([CCC 2011](#)). In other words, as James tells us, "...faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." ([James 2:17](#))

In Catholic theology, salvation is seen as a process that involves ongoing conversion, participation in the sacraments, and the practice of virtues. The sacraments, especially Baptism and the Eucharist, are considered essential for salvation. The Catechism explains, "The Church

affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation" ([CCC 1129](#)). Furthermore, the Catholic Church teaches that salvation is not earned by human effort alone but is a result of God's grace freely given. It is through God's grace that individuals are empowered to have faith, perform good works, and persevere in their journey towards holiness.

So, yes, it is about a personal relationship with God that starts with faith responding to God's freely given grace. We then seek to deepen that relationship as we would with any other interpersonal relationship – we seek to love God and love our neighbors as God loves us (unconditionally and purely out of the good of the other). We seek to model our lives after Christ as we become his intentional disciples; recognizing his will for us is the best path for our eternal good. If we live our lives trying to model ourselves after Jesus, working to surrender our will to his, and leveraging the graces that the Jesus provides us for our good through the sacraments we will be doing everything we can do to be saved.

Over the course of our lives, we will fail in our quest to live as Christ modelled and we will sin (we will fail to choose the good). The key is getting back up and continuing our faith journey through repentance and a recommitment to sinning no more. While all sin damages our relationship with both God and the rest of the members of the Body of Christ; only sins that involve grave matter (e.g., violations of the ten commandments for example), that are fully understood and freely chosen will sever our relationship with God and jeopardize our salvation. Under those conditions, the ordinary means of reconciliation is the sacrament of penance. An act of perfect contrition can also restore that relationship, but since we have no assurance that we have successfully completed such an act in our hearts (as humans it is easy to fool ourselves) only sacramental confession can give us the assurance of absolution.

**Q: Can we study other religions? Can we have other religious texts, though not practicing?**

A: The Church would never prevent you from studying other religions. The only caveat to that is the Church would caution you that you should be well grounded in the Catholic faith before engaging in that study to minimize the possibility of confusion. The Church recognizes that there are truths and beauty in many faith traditions that can be appreciated as God has revealed himself at least partially to all men. However, the fullness of truth is found only in the Catholic Church as it is the sole possessor of the fullness of revelation and the power to “bind and loose” (See Matthew [16:18-20](#) and [18:18-20](#)) that was given to it by Christ himself.

As for having other religious texts, it can be quite helpful to have them as references if you are engaged in apologetic or evangelization work. This is work we are all called to perform once we are Confirmed (See [CCC 1303](#)). Having a sound understanding of the beliefs and traditions of members of other faiths can be helpful in finding points of agreement and sharing Catholic teaching with them in the hopes of allowing God's grace to help them come to the fullness of the truth.

**Q: If Adam and Eve did not commit original sin, would God still have come into the world in the person of Jesus?**

A: This is a speculative question that theologians have played with for 2,000 years. There is no teaching from the Church on this because the Church does not speculate on what could have

been or what would have been if conditions were different. The Church focuses on revealed truths and what they mean for our understanding of God and who we are in relation to him.

Most theologians speculate that God's gift of free will ensured that at some point humans would abuse the gift and then need salvation. As a result, most believe that God's incarnation was always part of the divine plan as God, existing outside of time, would always have known that we would eventually fall.

**Q: Is it OK to date a Christian, even through your Catholic?**

A: Let's remember that Catholics are Christians. As a matter of fact, Catholics are the original Christians. Prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was only one type of Christian – Catholics. We have much in common with those separated brothers and sisters, who through no fault of their own, were raised in the tradition of a non-Catholic Christian ecclesial community. As a matter of fact, the amount that we agree upon is far greater than our differences, so you would be sharing the vast majority of your faith. You will find that it is far easier to develop a lasting relationship when you agree on so much regarding something as important as faith.

The only caution would be to make sure than in those areas where there is disagreement that you are sound in your understanding of the "what's?" and "why's?" of Catholic teaching so that you could effectively share that teaching. Without that knowledge you could find yourself buying into mistaken beliefs about Christianity or Catholicism. Very often, these types of relationship provide fertile ground for evangelization as the non-Catholic has usually had no exposure to the fullness of the faith that can only be found in the Catholic Church. However, they can also be opportunities for confusion so you need to once again make sure your faith is strong.

As a final word of caution, just make sure that you don't enter the relationship with an expectation that the individual you are dating will accept or convert to the faith. Change is hard and when someone has been raised in a loving environment by people they respect and trust; it is very difficult for them to accept the possibility (in this case a reality) that what they have been taught could be in error or incomplete. You will need to be patient and avoid pressing the issue. Live a life of love and joy and pray for the person to accept the graces God is giving them (you may be one of them) in his attempt to bring them to the fullness of the faith when they are ready.

**Q: Is there a difference between Marian devotions and Maria devotions or just between the two words – Marian and Maria?**

If by Maria devotions one is referring to a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of our incarnate God (Jesus – the second person of the Trinity), there is no difference.

**Q: If God lives outside of time and see everything, "in one shot", can people pray for someone who has already passed away and had their personal judgement and went to hell. Can those prayers (after the person went to hell) "take" the person out from hell when the final judgement happens?**

The Church's teaching on our judgement is clear and is found in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in paragraphs [CCC 1021-1022](#) (Particular Judgement) and [CCC 1038-1041](#) (Final



Judgement). We are judged at death and, "...each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith." (CCC 1021). The final judgement at the second coming is not a re-judgement. It would be better envisioned as an exposition of the effects of our lives so that all can see and be assured that the judgement rendered was just. The judgement that we receive at death is final and cannot be altered as our ability to change ends with physical death. As a result, if we end our lives rejecting communion with God, our decision is fixed, God will respect that decision and we will be separated from him forever.

The ability to pray across time is something that is debated by Theologians and there is no official Church teaching on it. The idea that one could pray for someone who has passed that they could receive and accept the graces necessary to choose the good (when they previously had chosen against the good), effectively impacting their eternal destination, is one that is speculated upon. However, most come down on the side that this would not work as God already gives everyone the graces needed to choose the good and that individual already rejected those graces. As a result, one would be praying for something God already did in the past that the individual chose to reject anyway in that same past. Hence, the final outcome cannot be changed. Some do speculate that God could respond to our prayers with additional actual graces (that he did not offer in that past) that may impact the decisions of the person we are praying for, but that is indeed the minority opinion.

**Q: How was Mary conceived without sin by her parents Sts. Anne and Joaquin?**

A: This was purely by a special grace of God who applied the salvific gift of Jesus to Mary across time. In essence, God provided Mary the sanctifying grace that was lost by our original parents in the fall, and that we can obtain through the Sacraments today, prior to her birth. It was not necessary, as God could have chosen anyone in any state to be the mother of his incarnate Son. However, it is certainly most fitting that Mary would be given this gift making her the perfect vessel of the second person of the Trinity. You can read about this in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 490-494](#).

Mary is considered the anti-type of the ark of the covenant and, as such, would be superior to the type – the physical ark. The physical ark contained the Word of God (ten commandments), the bread from heaven (the Manna), and the symbol of the high priest (Aarons' Rod). It was a carefully constructed container that was holy (set apart). Mary was the perfection of the ark containing the real Word of God incarnate (Jesus), the true bread from heaven (Jesus) and the one true high priest (Jesus). Therefore, it would be fitting that she would be full of grace and holy as the ark of the new covenant would be superior to the ark of the old covenant.

**Q: Why are there people out there saying, "God the Mother?" I've only heard this from one person – but I am sure there is more to this?**

A: The simple answer is ignorance. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "By calling God 'Father,' the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children. God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood, which emphasizes God's immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature. The language of faith thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first

representatives of God for man. But this experience also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood. **We ought therefore to recall that God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: he is God.** He also transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although he is their origin and standard: no one is father as God is Father.” ([CCC 239](#)) Hence, we use the language of fatherhood not to indicate physical masculinity but the reality that God is the origin and authority of everything; drawing upon our human use and meaning of language to represent that reality.

The key is God is neither male nor female as he does not have a physical body. This desire to express a female sexual attribute to God is often made out of a misguided desire to express the total equality of the sexes. The Church is already quite clear that men and women are of equal dignity and complimentary in nature (see [CCC 2331-2336](#)).

**Q: Why is it that man people get closer to God as we get older?**

A: There is no one specific reason for this general trend. It can be attributed to the gaining of life experience and hence, wisdom. It can be a growth in maturity where one moves from thinking about themselves to thinking about others. It can be an intellectual recognition that the arguments for God are stronger than those denying his existence. It could be all of those things and more. That said, we come to faith and deepen that faith through the grace of God – there is nothing we can do to merit it. As we get older, we may tend to be more open to accepting those graces and recognizing, that in that acceptance, we need to make changes to our life to conform to God’s plan for us. When we are still growing and maturing it is more difficult to submit to God’s will as we tend to be convinced that we know what is best for us. That changes as we live our lives and see the negative impact that following our own will can sometimes have upon us.

**Q: I have heard that people were forced to become Catholic by threats. How can we defend the Church from these claims? I believe this is especially claimed in California.**

A: What individuals claiming to be Catholic purport to do in the name of the Church is not the same as Church teaching. There have clearly been times in the last 2,000 years that individuals, including leaders in our faith, attempted to force non-believers or followers of other faiths to accept Catholic teaching. The Church has always taught what we find in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) today that, “Nobody may be forced to act against his convictions, nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience in religious matters...this right is based upon the very nature of the human person, whose dignity enables him to freely assent to the divine truth...” (See [CCC 2104-2109](#)).

While the Church invites and encourages people to embrace the Catholic faith, it does so through evangelization, education, and sharing the Gospel message. The Church respects the freedom of individuals to accept or reject its teachings and does not engage in forced conversions. That said, it is important to note that in some historical periods, there have been instances where people were coerced or pressured to convert to Catholicism. However, such actions were contrary to the teachings and principles of the Church. The Catholic Church condemns any form of forced conversion or violation of religious freedom.

In California there was widespread belief that arose in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement that the Church in general, and St. Junipero Serra specifically, was engaged in the forced conversion of indigenous peoples. This narrative has been proven to be false by the overwhelming majority of reputable historical scholars. However, it became a popular misconception that was accepted by many who were simply ignorant of history and easily swayed by loud voices that were interested in pressing an ideological framework with little regard to actual historical fact. If you want to get the facts this [ARTICLE](#) does a great job as does this [ARTICLE](#).

**Q: Is the Catholic teaching that scripture is inerrant, or that scripture is inerrant with regard to truths pertaining to salvation, dogma? Also, what is the minimum requirement for teaching to be dogma? Do two bishops constitute a magisterium? Would said two bishops need the pope's approval to declare a dogma?**

A: Let's start at the top with the inerrancy of scripture by making sure we are on the same page regarding what inerrancy of Sacred Scripture means. Inerrancy implies that the text is conveying fundamental truths but does not necessarily mean that it is a statement of historical or scientific fact. For example, the creation narratives in the books of Genesis are inerrant in that they convey fundamental truths regarding God's creation of everything out of nothing, the ordered nature of the world, and man's creation in God's image and likeness. However, as the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "God himself created the visible world in all its richness, diversity, and order. Scripture presents the work of the Creator **symbolically** (emphasis mine) as a succession of six days of divine 'work' concluded by the 'rest' of the seventh day...the sacred text teaches the truths revealed by God for our salvation, permitting us to 'recognize the inner nature, the value, and the ordering of the whole of creation to the praise of God.'" ([CCC 337](#)) The Catechism also provides us an excellent definition of Scriptural inerrancy defining it as, "The attribute of the books of Scripture whereby they faithfully and without error teach the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to have confided through the Sacred Scriptures."

With that out of the way let's also make sure we are clear on what Dogma is. A great definition can be found in a book entitled, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, (Ott, Ludwig; Baronius Press; 2018; pg. 4) that states, "Dogma in the strict sense is understood as a truth immediately (formally) revealed by God which has been proposed by the Magisterium of the Church to be believed as such. The First Vatican Council explains: 'All those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith that are contained in the Word of God, written (sacred Scripture) or handed down (Holy Tradition), and which the Church, either in solemn judgement or through her ordinary or universal teaching office, are proposed for belief as having been divinely revealed.'" Ott continues by stating the commonly held Thomist position on Dogma that it is, "...the truth proposed in the dogma must be immediately and formally contained in the sources of revelation either explicitly or implicitly." (IBID, pg. 5)

With those definitions out of the way we can address your first two questions. Regarding the inerrancy of Sacred Scripture, the answer is clearly, "Yes" that it is a dogmatic teaching that scripture is inerrant. It does not mean that scripture does not contain factual errors, (e.g., historic, scientific), but simply that as God's divinely inspired Word it conveys nothing but truths

about God, his creation, and man's relationship to God. This leads to the answer to your second question regarding the requirements for something to be declared dogmatic. As stated above in the definitions, Dogma must be divinely revealed to us either explicitly or implicitly through Sacred Scripture or Holy Tradition. The nature of God was revealed to us and hence we know that he is Truth itself and his Word (written or oral) is incapable of conveying falsehood.

As for the possibility of two Bishops declaring that something is Dogmatic with or without the Pope's approval that is not how Dogma or even universal Catholic Doctrine (infallible and mutable/changeable) is defined. While individual Bishops do possess their own personal magisterium that gives them the ability to bind those in their flock (their diocese) to specific teachings; it is only by the ordinary or universal exercise of the Church's magisterium that all of the Church's faithful can be bound to a specific level of assent. Generally, this is done through officially and formally declared teaching promulgated by the Pope individually, or, more ordinarily, through a document produced by an ecumenical council of Bishops in communion with the Pope that is issued with the Pope's approval.

If you would like to learn more about what is actually considered dogmatic the book by Ludwig Ott mentioned above is the "go to" source on the subject. If you would like to know more about the various levels and types of teaching authority in the Church there is a great book written by Jimmy Akin, entitled, *Teaching with Authority: How to Cut Through Doctrinal Confusion & Understand What The Church Really Says*, (Akin, Jimmy; Catholic Answers Press; El Cajon, CA; 2018) that is both accessible and quite thorough that includes some great references to both magisterial references and Ott's book.

**Q: This might be a touchy subject, but with what is happening between Israel and Palestine, I keep seeing comments in social media saying this is in the Bible or that we are living through the prophecy. I have not read the Bible I am not familiar, I would like to know if what is happening in the Bible or what is written.**

A: Whenever some big catastrophe happens or large-scale violence emerges in the world, you can be sure that someone will start talking about the "end times" or the signs of the apocalypse. There are several sources of apocalyptic literature in the Bible. Most are aware of the apocalyptic visions found in the second half of the book of Revelation, but the books of Joel, Zechariah, Isaiah (Chapters 24-27, 33), and Daniel (chapters 7-12) are all packed full of apocalyptic visions. Most of these pointed to events that would happen historically prior to Christ (e.g., the Babylonian exile) or immediately thereafter (e.g., the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70), but some also point to a vision of the end of times when Christ would return that would be preceded by a great world-wide tribulation.

Concern about the end of times tends to get escalated whenever catastrophe or violence occurs in the middle east and/or involves the state of Israel in some form. Both Catholics and Protestants do this. The difference mainly seems to be that Protestants start trying to chart out the apocalypse according to Daniel and Revelation, whereas Catholics try to chart it out based on various private revelations. But what Christians today often forget is that the Church has been talking about the "end times" since A.D. 33, when humanity crucified the Son of God. Jesus's death and resurrection was the beginning of the end, the sudden unveiling of God's final purpose for his creation.

The end is indeed coming but as Jesus himself tells us, "...of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." (Matthew 24:36). Most of Matthew chapter 24 is Jesus predicting both the destruction of Jerusalem that would come to pass in AD 70 and his own second coming. Jesus warns us that, "...you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the sufferings." (Matthew 24:6-8) Jesus goes on to tell us that at the end, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:29-31)

Over the course of Christian history there have been hundreds of predictions of the end based upon current events. Entire pseudo-Christian faiths (e.g., Jehovah's witnesses) and religious movements (e.g., Millerites which were precursors to 7<sup>th</sup> day Adventists) emerged in the United States in the 1800's (almost exclusively in the northeast and led by lay people poorly educated in scriptural interpretation). The good news is that every single prediction has proven to be incorrect, and the Catholic Church has never put stock in any of them (this includes the 3 Days of Darkness predictions that are very popular in Catholic circles today). Yes, the end is coming BUT we know how wonderful that end will be. This is exactly why even St. Paul can be so unconcerned with the coming apocalypse. Yes, death is coming, judgment is coming, heaven and hell are coming, all temporal things will have their end, but we already know what that ending looks like: the triumph of life over death, the restoration of all things in Christ.

Be confident that Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said, "...of that day and hour no one knows..." When people start claiming that they "know" the end is coming and that the predicted signs are occurring, you can be guaranteed that they actually do not know. Personally, whenever I come across this stuff on blogs, chats, tweets, articles, etc... I simply ignore it. If it is the end (very unlikely) that means our work here is done. If it's not (very likely) we need to continue to work hard to grow in love of God and neighbor and help others to come into relationship with God to do the same.

**Q: What is the difference between the 6th commandment and the 9th commandment? I know that they can be similar, but I've always wondered what are the differences.**

A: They are clearly related so you are not the only one that is looking for an explanation of the differences. The sixth commandment is, "You shall not commit adultery." That commandment is speaking to a prohibition of all sexual acts that are committed outside a valid marriage between a man and a woman and/or sexual acts within the context of a marriage that are not open to the creation of life (e.g., the use of artificial contraception). The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) has a great section on the commandments and their true meaning. You can find a delineation on the sixth commandment in [CCC 2331-2400](#) that includes a specific list of offenses against chastity in [CCC 2351-2359](#).

The 9th commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” is not focused on acts that one can commit but thoughts that one has and pursues. As Jesus tells us, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28). What Jesus is telling us here is that purity of thought is as important as purity of action. Again, the Catechism has a great section expounding on this topic in [CCC 2514-2533](#).

While the two commandments are related – one (#6) is referring to grave sins of action that violates God’s plan for human sexuality and the other is referring to grave sins of thought that violate the dignity of the human person (ourselves and those we include in those thoughts). When we allow those instinctual thoughts to linger and actually fuel them in our minds, we are reducing others to mere objects for our use and possession as opposed to recognizing them as the beloved sons and daughters of God that they truly are.

I hope that helps.

**Q: Why do we as Catholics say “Mass” and Christian churches say “Service” when speaking about the each respective Sunday celebrations? Curious as I’ve heard each group only use each name for their celebration exclusively.**

A: There are several reasons for the different terms. Originally, when the protestant revolution occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in a splintering of the Church Christ founded on the Apostles (the Catholic Church) and the creation of state Churches, the various protestant leaders (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Zwingli...) wanted to separate themselves from the Catholic Church in any way they could. Not only were there doctrinal differences (e.g., most protestant believe that the Christian rule of faith can be found in the Bible alone while Catholics believe the rule of faith can be found in the Word of God – both written and that passed on orally through the Apostles and their successors) but they deliberately chose to modify practices and use different terms for their attempt at mimicking Catholic worship.

The term “Mass” comes from the Latin “missa” which in turn means “mission” or “sending”. We call the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass the Mass because at the end of each Mass we are sent forth to share the good news of Jesus Christ through the lives we lead and / or the direct sharing of Christ’s teaching. Protestants have a wide variety of beliefs, but most reject the concept of the Mass as a sacrifice (a central teaching of the Catholic Church). As a result, many have picked up the term “service” to differentiate it from the Catholic Mass. Strangely enough, we would agree that what protestants do when they gather is primarily a bible study, educational forum, or prayer “service.” It is not the worship Christ commanded and that was practiced by Catholics from the 1<sup>st</sup> century onward.

For the most part a protestant service lacks all connection to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass instituted by Christ. There is no possibility of an encounter with the Real Presence of Christ (Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity) in the Eucharist as the protestant ministers are not validly ordained priests and hence are incapable to confecting it on those occasions they do celebrate “The Lord’s Supper.” Lacking the ability to validly confer Holy Orders also mean their ministers cannot act in persona Christi (in the person of Christ) for their congregations – this eliminates a second of the four ways one encounters Christ in the Catholic Mass. Protestants can share the Word of God (proclaim and expound upon Sacred Scripture) so those that attend their services

can encounter Christ through his Word. They can also encounter Christ in each other for those protestant communities that have retained valid Baptisms and hence have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. This minimization of a protestant's ability to encounter Christ, combined with their lack of adherence to Christ's command to celebrate and join in his sacrifice, relegates what they do to the level of a simple "service." At least they have accurately named their gatherings even if they are a merely a shadow of the encounter Christ intended for those that follow him.

**Q: What is the Catholic Church's stance on Milton's *Paradise Lost*? I am curious about the classic book, and I want to know if there are any incorrect theological stances to be aware of while reading it. I know the book is about Satan's fall, but I think the book also states that God wanted humanity to fall in the Garden. What is the Church's stance on it? Also, do you know where Milton got the idea for this story? Is this original story part of Sacred Tradition or did Milton create it whole-cloth?**

A: The first thing we need to be clear about is that *Paradise Lost* is not a magisterial text and hence has no weight with regards to Catholic teaching. It is an imaginative work of fiction and poetry that does contain some truths but also some gross errors in the theology it expresses. It draws upon the Biblical truths conveyed in Genesis and beyond, but paints God the Father in a light that conflicts with central Church teachings regarding the nature of God and our understanding of the Trinity.

The Church has no official stance on *Paradise Lost* as the Church rarely comments on work's outside of its area of expertise – faith and morals. It is fine for a well-formed Catholic to read, study, and be entertained by it as the work of fiction that it is, but one should not view it as Catholic teaching in any way. If you want to understand more about the work including Milton's motivation and inspiration; this [ARTICLE](#) does a nice job of placing it in its historical context so you better understand its influences.

The bottom line is that when we are seeking Church teaching, we should seek sources of official and approved magisterial teaching like the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). While secular literature that draws upon the Bible and Christendom can be both entertaining and, to some level, spiritually illuminating, we must make sure we are clear on which elements are and are not aligned with the teachings of Christ which are safeguarded and handed on by the Magisterium.

## Week of 10/02

**Q: I noticed that the only way that an act of perfect contrition obtains pardon for mortal sins is that if the person "includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible." I had a wondering spring up from reading this. Suppose Person A commits a mortal sin, and his church hosts confessions all week, but his usual schedule is that he confesses on the weekend before mass. If Person A commits a mortal sin, performs an act of perfect contrition, but doesn't go to confession during the week and waits until the weekend to confess because that's his usual schedule. If Person A was to die before the weekend to confess, would he have obtained pardon for his mortal sins? Or would he be damned because he didn't go during the week when confession was available, and he wanted to wait until his usual weekend confession for some arbitrary reason? (The reason could be anything in this hypothetical scenario that I'm suggesting, whether it be something as little**

**as wanting to save gas money or him being too tired. Or it could be something that completely hindered him from going at all).**

A: The requirement for one to avail themselves of sacramental confession “as soon as possible” after committing an act of perfect contrition (which does indeed “obtain forgiveness of mortal sin”) is found in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) paragraph [CCC 1452](#).

Our God is a good, good, father. He is not a stern judge waiting for us to make a mistake or small deviation from the letter of the law so he can condemn us. He knows what is in our heart, and, if one truly resolves to avail themselves of sacramental confession as soon as is reasonably possible, considering the demands of their life and schedule, God recognizes that. He does not require one to “drop everything” or incur a hardship by altering one’s committed schedule to meet the requirement. Ideally, we would want to confess as quickly as possible for our own peace of mind that is gained through the knowledge of the definitive restoration of grace one receives through the sacrament.

If one is committed to the sacrament as a specific date and time that is reasonable God is aware of that commitment. If one should die before that commitment can be met, God will consider it met as a “confession of desire.”

**Q: The Catholic Church taught for two millennia that the death penalty was morally permissible. The most recent version of the Catechism, however, now states it is prohibited. How can this apparent change in teaching legitimately be deemed a "development of doctrine" as opposed to an outright reversal of prior Church teaching? And does the novel characterization of the death penalty as "inadmissible" (as opposed to "inherently evil") have any theological significance?**

A: First off one needs to understand that there are 5 levels of Church teaching: 1) Dogma (Divinely Revealed Truths), 2) Doctrine-Infallible (A Consequence of or necessary requirement of Divinely Revealed Truths), 3) Doctrine-Mutable (A Teaching the Church holds to be true based upon the information it has), 4) Non-Doctrinal Teachings/Statements, and 5) Theological Opinions. Only the first two are truths that can never change and only the first three require the assent of the Catholic faithful. The overwhelming majority of Church teachings fall into category 3 and hence can substantially change. The central teachings of the Catholic Church fall into categories 1 & 2 and can develop but not substantially change.

You are referring to CCC 2267 which was changed by Pope Francis. That paragraph of the Catechism originally published in 1992 used to say, “Assuming the guilty party’s identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor. If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people’s safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person. Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm – without definitively taking away the possibility of redeeming himself – the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not



practically non-existent.” That statement was directly aligned with Pope Saint John Paul II’s limits on the death penalty described in [Evangelium Vitae](#) (#56).

The old definition was very clear that the death penalty was only permissible if the society had no other means of ensuring the offender could not be prevented from harming others. The teaching on the death penalty was never declared dogma or infallible doctrine. It has always been mutable doctrine and hence subject to change as information and conditions change. What Pope Francis did was build upon the changes the last several popes have made with regards to this teaching and recognize that in modern western countries who have prison systems capable of incarcerating someone for life safely and humanely that the conditions under which the death penalty was “an absolute necessity” no longer exist. This is not to say that in 20 years something catastrophic can not happen where this can change again making the death penalty a necessary recourse.

The new paragraph CCC 2267 reads, “Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good. Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption. Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.” What this paragraph is recognizing is that the need for the death penalty does not currently exist and hence the dogmatic teaching, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” must be recognized as binding as there no longer exists a condition where the death penalty can be considered a just form of self-defense.

Hopefully comparing the two paragraphs “side-by-side” allows you to recognize that what the new teaching represents is indeed a justifiable development of mutable doctrine. As for the question on the term “inadmissible” versus “intrinsically evil”, the former was used in recognition that conditions could change (e.g., some cataclysmic event that renders modern prison systems ineffective) and hence there could be conditions prevailing in the future where the death penalty would be admissible once again. When something is declared “intrinsically evil” (e.g., abortion) it is a statement that there are no conditions possible under which the act could be committed.

**Q: What are the red candles in the Church called?**

A: There are a number of candles in the church that sit within red glass containers. The candles themselves are not red, but the glass holding them is. The one located near the tabernacle is called the Tabernacle Lamp. You will find one of these in every Catholic Church in the world usually standing by or hanging near the tabernacle. When lit, the tabernacle lamp is indicating that Jesus is present – body, blood, soul, and divinity – in the tabernacle under the appearances of the consecrated host. This is why, when entering a Catholic Church, one should always look for the tabernacle and find the tabernacle lamp. Once the tabernacle lamp is located, if it is lit,

one should genuflect towards the tabernacle in recognition of the presence of the King of Kings in our midst.

In our Church there are also several hundred small candles sitting in red glass located in what are called votive stations that sit near the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe (north side of Nave), the image of Jesus (south side of Nave), and the images (statues) of the Holy Family (in the northwest corner of the Church). Votive candles are lit by those seeking the intercession of the person(s) which are located near the votive stations. Lighting a votive candle is a symbolic means of keeping one's prayer active long after he/she ceases praying (for the duration of candle remaining lit) for the intercession of the person(s) to whom he / she was praying.

**Q: Can we, the Altar Servers, sing the songs during Mass?**

A: The songs that are sung during Mass are a form of prayer that are intended to help us focus on the worship of God through our adoration, thanksgiving, atonement, and petition. Like any other prayer that the assembly participates in praying (we should not be praying the prayers that are specifically limited to the celebrant – e.g., the Eucharistic Prayer) Altar Servers are more than welcome to join in as long as in doing so it does not distract you from your ministerial role or result in a distraction to the assembly. For example, if you do not know the words and must constantly turn to see the projection that could both distract you and the members of the assembly who are all looking in your general direction. In that case you should avoid trying to sing along. However, if you can sing without disruption you should feel free to add your voice to these beautiful prayers that the assembly is offering to our living God.

**Q: What is the Catholic Church's stance on Halloween? My family has told my son that participating in any activities related to Halloween means you are celebrating the Devil. Should I not be allowing my son to dress up and participate in Halloween activities at school, such as trunk-or-treat parades, or allow him to go trick or treating with his friends? As a teacher, I see no harm in allowing children to engage in imaginative play but I would really like to know if my family's words to my son have truth to them or how I can explain to them that participating in family-friendly Halloween activities doesn't mean we are celebrating the Devil.**

A: That is a great question and very timely as we are four weeks away from Halloween. Let's start with a reality check on the origin of the Holiday. The word Halloween comes from the traditional Catholic feast "All Hallow's Eve," referring to the Solemnity of All Saints. The word hallow is just another form of the word "holy," and that's why in the Lord's prayer we say, "Hallowed be thy name." When we pray that petition of the Lord's prayer we're hoping and wishing and praying that people will treat God's name as holy. But that's what "Hallowed be thy name" means. In the same way, a hallow is a holy person, and so it's just another word for "saint." English has this dual vocabulary that it got from Latin and German, and the Latin word for saint is sanctus, which is where we get saint from; but the German word gives us hallow, so a hallow is simply a saint, and All Hallows Day is the day where we celebrate all of the saints who are in heaven.

This is a special day on the Church's calendar. Traditionally people get ready for special days. For example, Christmas is a big day, and so people do special things on Christmas Eve to get ready for Christmas. In the same way, people historically have done special things on the eve of All

Saints Day. In terms of the religious observances, celebration Halloween (All Hallows Eve) is actually a way of honoring our Christian forebears and the example that they gave us.

In the modern celebration of Halloween, there's a mix of good and bad. Some modern aspects of the pop culture celebration of Halloween aren't great, and we can acknowledge that. The key for us is making sure our kids understand what exactly we are celebrating on All Hallows Eve. When we see people running around glorifying evil that's not in keeping with the spirit of honoring our Christian forebears. On the other hand, we don't have to be puritanical about it. It can be legitimate, as a form of imaginative play, to play dress-up, and you don't have to play dress-up as a saint. Kids enjoy play and dress up as other things, whether it's nurses, police officers, firemen, etc... and all kinds of different roles that they might have as adults as they seek to fulfill God's will. And it's not intrinsically wrong to dress up as a monster just for fun.

Here in the United States, the celebration of Halloween includes trick-or-treating – the giving and receiving of gifts. One obviously shouldn't glorify the darker side of the modern celebration. But instead of turning off your porch light and not giving out any candy, why not instead provide treats and say "God bless you" to the children who knock on your door? In other words, take back the night.

Those relatives that are telling you it is wrong to celebrate Halloween simply do not understand what the Holiday is on the Catholic Liturgical calendar. The Catholic Church teaches that culture and popular customs can be integrated into the Christian life as long as they are not contrary to the faith. Therefore, Catholics can engage in Halloween activities that are not contrary to their faith and do not involve promoting or glorifying anything contrary to Christian values. As long as the true meaning of the holiday is impressed upon your children the fun celebrations associated with it are perfectly fine from the Church's perspective.

**Q: What is the meaning "the last will be first and the first shall be last"? Thank you**

A: Thanks for the question. You were clearly listening in Mass this weekend as that is the last verse of this past Sunday's Gospel reading ([Matthew 20-1-16](#)). As with all scripture there are several messages that can be pulled from this great parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. The Navarre Bible Commentary (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 2005) provides an excellent summary of this passage that is itself summed up by this last verse – "the last will be first and the first shall be last." According to this commentary:

"This parable was addressed to a Jewish audience whom God called at an early hour, centuries ago. Now the Gentiles are also being called—with an equal right to form part of the new people of God, the Church. In both cases it is a matter of a gratuitous, unmerited, invitation; therefore, those who were the "first" to receive the call have no grounds for complaining when God calls the "last" and gives them the same reward—membership of his people. At first sight the laborers of the first hour seem to have a genuine grievance—because they do not realize that to have a job in the Lord's vineyard is a divine gift. Jesus leaves us in no doubt that although he calls us to follow different ways, all receive the same reward—heaven."

On the literal level the verse is simply restating the vineyard owner's command to pay the workers in reverse order of their call (Matthew 20:8). On the spiritual level the commentary from Navarre provides great insight into the meaning of this parable. You could add to it by proposing that the last are rewarded first because those that had worked in communion with God from the beginning had been receiving the rewards that come with faith all along and that God is choosing to reward the latecomers out of a sense of mercy as the others had already experienced the joys of being part of God's family.

### **Q: When was the Bible made and who found the Bible?**

A: What a great question. Most people never really think about where the bible came from. I am sure some think it miraculously appeared out of nowhere. Here is what you need to know...

The bible is actually a library of 73 different books. There are 46 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. The 73 books were written over the span of ~1500 years by >40 different authors. The books are written using multiple genres - history, poetry, biography, allegory, etc... - by writers from different cultures and historical time periods. The first book of the bible was written in ~1400 BC and is believed to be the book of Job. The last book of the bible was written in ~AD 100 and is believed to be the book of Revelation.

All 73 books are one contiguous story about who God is and who we are in relation to God (his beloved sons and daughters). The books of the Bible are a story of progressive and gradual revelation that were written by human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They say no more or no less than God wanted said and provide us with fundamental truths (although not always historical facts) about God, his plan for our salvation, and our destiny.

The Old Testament books were written by the Hebrew people and are broken down into four major groups – the 5 books of the Law known as the Torah or Pentateuch, the 16 books of history, the 7 books of wisdom, and the 18 books of prophecy. The final collection of 46 Old Testament books was not defined by the Hebrew people as there were different groups within the Hebrew people that recognized different sets of books as inspired by God. Some like the Sadducees only accepted the 5 books of the Law while others like the Pharisees accepted more than the 46 books. It was actually the Catholic Church, drawing upon the traditional use of a version of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint by Jesus and the Apostles that allowed the Catholic Church to define the 46 books as inspired scripture.

The New Testament books were written by the Apostles or students of the Apostles from 20-70 years after the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. There were other writings written around that same time period or in the first couple of centuries following the death of the last Apostle that were not included. Unless a book was written during the Apostolic age (AD 30-AD 100), was written by an Apostle or one of their students, and was widely read as scripture in the early Churches ;it was not considered inspired scripture. Even if a writing did meet those three criteria, if it directly contradicted other scriptural truths, it was rejected as false.

The 73 books of the Bible were identified by early Church Fathers (e.g., Athanasius in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century) and were ultimately declared as canonical by regional and ecumenical Church councils

(Rome-392; Hippo-393; Carthage-397, 419; Florence – 1441). There was really never any major disagreement with which books would be included or the Church's ability (given by Christ himself) to define the canon until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was then that the Protestant revolutionaries led by Martin Luther called into question the Bible's contents and decided that 7 of the Old Testament books did not belong - Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch (plus portions of Esther and Daniel). This led the Catholic Church to respond by definitively and infallibly defining the 73 books as Sacred Scripture in 1546 once and for all. Strangely enough the current Hebrew Scriptures were not defined until the late in the first millennium (AD 700-1000) long after the Catholic Church defined the contents of the Old and New Testaments.

The bottom line is that the Bible has a long history and was finally assembled in its full and current form by the Catholic Church exercising the power to bind and loose (Matthew 16 & 18) that was given to it by Christ himself to define, interpret and safeguard the faith. Ironically, those that reject the Catholic faith and claim they are Bible alone Christians are overlooking the historical fact that it was indeed the Catholic Church that assembled the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised would lead the Church to all truth. Those same Protestants in rejecting 7 of the Old Testament books are relying on the decisions of men (e.g., Martin Luther) as opposed to replying on the Church established and empowered by God himself.

## Week of 09/25

**Q: I've been reading more on the Catholic doctrine of salvation and I'm still confused on something. I've been Catholic for a long time but I've struggled understanding how we are saved. If we are saved by faith and works, what counts as works? Are they the works of mercy? Do deeds outside the works of mercy count as works? Are works just generally loving our neighbor? How do we discern what to do in regards of "works" in order to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." And what if someone doesn't know what to do in regards of works? What if they don't know what works to do? Or even are unable to carry out works? What would be the eternal fate for that person's soul? I've been struggling on understanding the "works" part on how us Christians are saved by faith and works.**

A: Let's start by clearing up a misperception. The Catholic Church does not teach that we are saved by faith and works. The Catholic Church teach that we are saved by God's freely offered and undeserved grace (which we must accept) and that there is no amount of effort we could put forth to earn our salvation.

However, we also believe that if we do indeed accept God's grace and become intentional disciples of Jesus Christ, that act (work) will manifest in us a desire to conform our lives to his will. The result of intentional discipleship is that we will naturally perform corporal and spiritual works of mercy out of charity (love) in our hearts for both God and our neighbor. As James tells us, "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 2:14-17) In other words

our work of love are a natural outpouring of a living faith enabling us to, "...be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." (James 1:22)

Now on to the details regarding Church teaching on salvation...

Baptism is the gateway through which we pass to gain entry into Christ's body and required for our initial justification ([CCC 1266-1267](#)). The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission." ([CCC 1213](#)) Yet, passing through that gateway is no guarantee of salvation – the brokenness of our nature allows us to choose against the good and, if that choice leads us into mortal sin, we can lose our salvation. Through the sacrament of Penance, we can regain our salvation and through the great sacrament of Holy Communion we can be healed (of venial sin), strengthened (against sin), transformed (to be more Christlike) and unified (to Christ and the other members of his Body).

Without passing through the "gateway" via Baptism salvation is not open to us. As Peter tell us, "Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." ([1 Peter 3:21](#)) The Catechism makes this clear as well when it says, "The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation ([John 3:5](#)). He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them ([Matthew 28:18-19](#)). Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament ([Mark 16:16](#)). The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude." ([CCC 1257](#)) However, the Church also holds that, "Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity." ([CCC 1260](#))

Our Salvation is a journey, not a one-time event. This short [ARTICLE](#) does a nice job of explaining the nature of this journey that begins with Baptism, but continues for the balance of our post-baptismal lives. If you prefer a slightly longer audio explanation of the Catholic doctrine of salvation Jimmy Akin does a great job with it [HERE](#).

**Q: My sister changed religion to be Christians. I am having a hard time understanding the difference and why she says that Catholics added to the Bible. I know we don't have the same Bible. Also, why do they not find the need to confess to a person?**

A: What your sister is suffering from is a lack of understanding of history. First off Catholics are Christians. We are the original Christians as members of the Church founded by Christ himself 2,000 years ago. Protestant Christians – those that reject the authority of the Pope and some of the teachings of the Catholic Church – are a man-made creation. All modern days Protestants – both mainline and evangelical – can trace their origins to Martin Luther and others (like John

Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Henry VIII) that split from the Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. For the first 1,500 of the 2,000 years of Christianity there was only one type of Christian – Catholic!

The Bible was assembled and canonized by the Catholic Church. As a matter of fact the Church existed before the Bible as the 27 New Testament books were not written until 2-6 decades after Christ's ascension. It was the Catholic Church that declared which books would and would not be included in the New Testament. This authority was given to the Church when Christ established it naming Peter as its head (Matthew 16) and giving the Apostles the ability to assist Peter in establishing and enforcing law, passing on authentic teaching, and safeguarding the deposit of the faith. Remember, Christ write nothing. Everything we have in the Bible regarding him comes from the Church he established through Peter and the Apostles that Jesus himself promised would never fail and would be safeguarded by the Holy Spirit (also Matthew 16).

When Martin Luther led a German split from the Church in 1517, he decided that seven of the Old Testament books that had been accepted by all Christians for 1,500 years were not inspired text (a man decided this, not the Church God established). Luther had those books removed from the Bible-it was not the Catholic Church that added them. Coincidentally, the books that Luther had removed supported universally held Church doctrines (e.g., like Purgatory, Confession, Ministerial Priesthood, etc...) that Luther rejected. One way to support his beliefs was to eliminate and/or ignore anything that contradicted him – this included the inspired word of God. This is a common tactic of the Protestant “Reformers”. For example... Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife – Katherine of Aragon. They were validly married, and hence, the Church had no authority to end their marriage. Henry's answer was to create his own Church where he was the head and that allowed him to grant himself a divorce and hence the Church of England was born (the Anglican Church).

The result of the “work” of those early “reformers” is we now have thousands of Christian ecclesial communities and more pop up every day. As soon as someone struggles with a teaching of their community, they simply form a new community and declare themselves the source of truth. Meanwhile, the Church Christ founded 2,000 years ago continues in preserving what was handed on from Jesus and we see Jesus' promise that the “gates of hell would not prevail against it” continues to be realized as the Church is the oldest continuous institution in the history of humanity.

Saint Paul warned about what would eventually happen with the emergence of Protestantism when he wrote to Timothy, “Proclaim the Word. Be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient. Convince, reprimand, encourage in all patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but following their own desires and insatiable curiosity will accumulate teachers and stop listening to the truth, and it will be diverted to myths. But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship, perform the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:2-5) Unfortunately, it is far easier to believe a message that makes you feel comfortable than facing the truth as Jesus delivered it. Hence, those that struggle with the Catholic faith will often abandon it (they are actually abandoning Jesus) in favor of a Christian community that has decided for itself what is true. We can only pray for them and hope that someday these separated brothers and sisters of our will return.

If your sister would like to challenge anything about Church history or the teachings of the Catholic Church I would love to speak with her. Most Protestants are what we call invincibly ignorant of the truth. Through no fault of their own, they have been led astray by people they trust and once they are confronted with the truth will return.

**Q: Why do Christians not believe in the Virgin Mary?**

A: I assume what you mean by this is why don't other Christian ecclesial communities who are not in communion with the Pope (Protestants) venerate the Virgin Mary. Christians all recognize Mary as the mother of Jesus. It is not a matter of believing in her or not. It is more likely a misconception on their part about what we believe and what our prayers directed towards her represent.

As Catholics we do not worship Mary (many Protestants believe we do), we give her the respect she is due as the mother of the second person of the Godhead. When Jesus gave her to John as his spiritual mother at the foot of the Cross ([John 19:26-27](#)) he gave her to all of us as our spiritual mother and intercessor. When we pray to Mary, we recognize that she is a creature just like us and, as a result, has no power to answer our prayers. However, as a saint in heaven and the loving mother of Jesus she can pray on our behalf and that is what we ask her to do (just like we would ask anyone else to pray for us). As James tells us, the prayers of the righteous are valuable. ([James 5:16](#)) and who is more righteous than Mary? Is Jesus more likely to listen to us or to his mother?

If you run across someone who is confused about what we believe about Mary you should reference them to the Catechism of the Catholic Church and have them read CCC [487-507](#), [963-975](#). What they will often discover after reading about what the Church actually teaches, is that they very much agree with it. What they disagree with is a misconception of what the Church teaches and, unfortunately, the practices of many Catholics who have those same misconceptions.

**Q: I've heard some discussion/debate about how to receive the Eucharist (hands vs. mouth/ kneeling). Is there a preferred or more reverent way? What is the best way to receive?**

A: Reception of the Eucharist in either the hand or on the tongue are both completely valid methods of reception in the Latin Rite of the Mass (see General Instructions of the Roman Missal – Norms for Distribution of Communion Under Both Kinds, #41). Reverence is not something that is tied to one physical act or another – it is a spiritual state. One can appear to be very reverent while actually being quite irreverent. Jesus called out the Pharisees for this when he says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” ([Matthew 23:27-28](#))

When people start assigning a higher state of reverence to one physical posture and / or begin to judge the legitimate practices of others they are walking down a dangerous path. There is no one best way to receive. Each individual should receive the Eucharist in the way that seems most appropriate and reverent for them. For some it is, “...making a throne for the King” with



their hands as St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed his Catechumens when they received (which, by the way, is the oldest method of reception and how the Apostles received at the Last Supper). For others it is on the tongue. For some it is kneeling in deference to being in the presence of our King. For others it is standing for the very same reason.

We have two allowable methods. The reverence of each individual is tied to disposition of each individual and NOT the method chosen.

**Q: How extensive are our duties under Catechism 1868. For example, if we have friends or family that are unmarried but living as man and wife, do we need to bring it up every time we see them? Can we bring it up once and have it be done?**

A: This can be a sensitive topic, so you want to be firm, while moving forward out of love and respect for them as sons and daughters of God.

Jesus himself gives us great guidance on this when he says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church; and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ([Matthew 18:15–17](#))

So, out of love of neighbor and concern for their eternal soul you do want to highlight the sinful actions they may be committing. You want to make sure they understand that your only reason for highlighting the issue is out of concern for their eternal souls. It is an act of love to rebuke a sinner. To not do so would be an act of selfishness (the opposite of love). It would be helpful to be versed on the Church Teachings in this area and I would recommend reviewing the section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on marriage ([CCC 1601-1666](#)) and sins against chastity ([CCC 2331-2400](#)). You may even want to consider printing these sections out and leaving them with them to read.

All that said, you must also remember that the sins they are committing do not give them amnesia. You can point out the issue once, let them know that your love for them is unconditional and that you will not be bringing it up again. You can also let them know that you will be praying for them. Once this is done, there is nothing else productive that you can do other than model an authentic Christian life for them.

If they persist in living in a sinful condition your only other concern would be what impact your association with them could have on your own family (especially children). If your continued association with them could give others the impression that you approve of their lifestyle you should consider ending the relationship and explaining why this is to them.

**Q: Who are the women of the Bible that conceived a son by the Holy Spirit? Was the mother of Mary, Anne, one of them?**

A: Mary, the mother of God, was the only women that we are aware of that conceived a child “by the Holy Spirit.” In the Bible we hear the Angel Gabriel tell Mary that, “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](#)). This means that Mary conceived Jesus without having sexual intercourse with Joseph to whom she was betrothed at the time. This allows Jesus to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah who told us that, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us).” ([Isaiah 7:14](#))

We do hear about a number of women in the Bible who conceived a child with the help of God. However, in all those cases the sexual act was involved, and God was simply supplying the grace necessary to help the couple participate in the creation of life. One example would be with Abraham’s wife, Sarah, in [Exodus 18:9-15](#) and [Exodus 21:1-7](#). We also see God intervening in the case of Jacob’s wives (Leah and Rachel) in [Genesis 29:31-30:24](#). A third example would be God’s intervention for Hannah ([1 Samuel 1:9-23](#)). There are other examples of divine intervention in the Old Testament and in the New Testament we see a similar intervention for Mary’s relative and the mother of John the Baptist, Elizabeth, in [Luke 1:5-17](#).

Mary’s mother, Anne, did not conceive by the Holy Spirit in the sense that the normal course of sexual relations was not necessary - Anne and Joaquin conceived in the usual manner. However, God did intervene in that conception in a miraculous way in that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin. This is known as the immaculate conception, and you can read about it in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 490-494](#) which references a variety of passages from Sacred Scripture, Magisterial Documents, and the writings of Church Fathers.

#### **Q: How will this help me?**

A: This is a pretty general question, so I am going to have to interpret it a bit. It could be that you want to know how: 1) having faith in God and growing in that faith can help you, 2) participating in a faith formation program can help you, or 3) asking questions can help you. I will attempt to answer the question in all three ways.

- 1) How does having faith in God and growing in that faith help you?
  - a. We were created by God and our existence is tied directly to his being. This means that until we are united fully with him, we will always have a “God Shaped” hole in our hearts. Far too many of us spend our entire lives seeking to fill that hole with other “things.” Some of these are quite destructive both for this very limited life on earth and for our eternal lives.
  - b. Having faith in God means trusting in God’s plan for us and seeking to make his will for us our will for ourselves. God wants nothing but our eternal good and knows exactly what we need to experience, struggle with, relish in, succeed at, fail at, etc.... in this life to maximize our readiness for eternal life. This life is an “apprenticeship” where we are learning how to master love (of God and of neighbor). God knows what we have to learn to become a “master of love” and if we trust in his plan we will succeed in doing so.
  - c. If you have a solid faith and grow in that faith throughout your life there is nothing – good, bad, or ugly – that you will face in this life that you cannot handle. At the same time, knowing that you have an eternal life ahead of you can live out and learn in this life with a joy that will make this life so much more enjoyable for you and inspirational for other. Someone who lacks faith will not only fear death but will tend to live a life of material and psychological selfishness as they, themselves, will

be the center of their own lives and all decisions they make will take only their own wants and needs into consideration. This is often a life of struggle and loneliness where one never has enough and must always be fighting for more.

- 2) How does participating in a faith formation program help you?
  - a. We all need help to succeed. We have coaches, mentors and teachers that can help us grow and develop the skills we need to succeed. Faith is no different – surrounding yourself with others that are practicing the faith who can help you grow in it is a great start. Participating in formal faith formation programs can help you understand what you do not know and make it easier to grow closer to God by demystifying Church teachings.
  - b. That said, faith formation programs and the teachers / catechists that lead them can only help you if you want to be helped. The best coach in the world cannot force you to become a better athlete. It is something you have to want for yourself and then work for. That desire for faith comes from God who gives us all the graces we need to come to know him. He also gives us free will so that we can reject these graces and ultimately God himself.
  - c. Faith formation programs provide the outline of what our faith is all about and give us the skills we need to take control of our individual faith journeys. Once we take control, we can turn that outline into a complete picture.
- 3) How can asking questions about the faith help you?
  - a. Everything we learn we learn by having it modelled for us or taught to us and then by asking questions regarding the elements of what was modelled / taught that don't seem to make sense. If our questions go unasked and / or unanswered we can often end up with a quite distorted understanding of the topic we are studying or skill we are trying to master. We tend to fill into our gaps in understanding with our own preferences and that can be a very dangerous thing to allow when you consider that the topic we are misunderstanding is our eternal life.
  - b. At the same time, the questions we ask can often help others who are having similar struggles move beyond them. Very often a question asked by one person results in addition people gaining insights or can lead to other questions. If we fail to ask these questions, we are not only failing ourselves but we are letting down the others that our question would have benefited.

**Q: Can you please direct me towards some early Church Fathers' support of The Assumption of Mary? I absolutely accept the Dogmatic teaching, but would appreciate (for the benefit of apologetic use) some assistance in this regard. Per Dr. Gavin Ortlund, very little writings support this prior to 5th century. I was surprised to learn this and hope you can help buttress our position.**

A: I think I can help a bit, but I am also going to recommend a book by Tim Staples entitled, *Behold Your Mother – A Biblical and Historical Defense of the Marian Doctrines* (Catholic Answers Press; El Cajon, CA; 2014). Pages 197-230 of Tim's book focuses on the Dogma of the Assumption and provides a response to Protestant objections to it.

I would like to start with the weakness that you find in all arguments from silence. When there is universal agreement on a topic there is nothing to argue about or defend and hence there is an absence of writings on a topic. This is why the phrase, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” has become a time worn adage (a proverb or short statement expressing a general truth). One of the reasons why there is not a great deal of writings from the Fathers is that it seemed clear from the biblical and historical evidence that the Mary had been assumed. “Much of the early Christian literature was apologetic in nature, dealing with problem areas in the Church that needed to be addressed. But there is simply no record of anyone disagreeing on the matter of the assumption.” (Staples, Tim; *Behold Your Mother – A Biblical and Historical Defense of the Marian Doctrines*; Catholic Answers Press; El Cajon, CA; 2014)

Let start with Revelation 11:19-12:2 which speaks about the ark of the new covenant (Mary) in heaven and the pregnant woman (about to give life to the Savior) with the crown of stars standing on the moon. This is a clear reference to Mary bodily in heaven (can also be a symbol of the Church and Israel). Most forget that the Biblical books were not originally separated into chapters (there was no punctuation either) so the breaking points we see today were created by men. The separation of these two verses across two “chapters” allows many to miss the connection. However, for the Church Fathers (and all early Christians for that matter) this artificial separation would not have been present.

Another fact is that while there are two tombs of Mary – one in Ephesus (where she would have been with John) and one in Jerusalem (where she lived for some time) – both are empty. We have no relics of Mary even though her relics would be amongst the most venerated. Considering the history of the Church with relics, the only way this could be explained would be if her body no longer resided on this planet.

Most of those, like Dr. Ortlund, who point to the lack of existence of any early documentary evidence for the assumption prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> century (not 5<sup>th</sup>) reference the writing of Gregory of Tours in 590 entitled *Eight Books of Miracles*, which documents the assumption, as the origin of that belief. However, there are, “...recently discovered Syriac fragments of stories about the assumption that date to as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century...” (Staples, Tim; *Behold Your Mother – A Biblical and Historical Defense of the Marian Doctrines*; Catholic Answers Press; El Cajon, CA; 2014) which point to the existence of earlier, yet undiscovered texts. The 6<sup>th</sup> century arrival of documentary evidence for the assumption is simply not true.

Tim Staples book provides several other arguments for the assumption as well as a series of replies to other objections to it that I believe you would find of interest. I hope all that helps.

**Q: Many times people will pray for something in their life to come to fruition and promise to complete an action in return (e.g. for a parent to heal in return for the person praying to volunteer hours in a place). When the person praying promises something long term and fails to do so, what happens?**

A: When we ask God for something for either ourselves or others it is called a prayer of petition. God hears our prayer every single time. However, God is not a “cosmic vending machine” where we put a prayer in, give him some payment and he delivers a desired result. God’s desire for

what is best for us does not depend on what we do for him – his love for us is unconditional and he will continue to give us the graces we need to become the best possible version of ourselves regardless of what we do and if we fulfill our end of the covenant between us.

God is a good, good, Father - the best Father we could ever want, the model of fatherhood for us on earth. Like a good earthly father, our Father in heaven will not always give us everything we ask for. We give our children what we believe is best for them (not everything they ask for) knowing that they do not always understand what that might be. God is no different. He hears our prayers, and he answers them every time. Sometimes that answer is, “No” because that is ultimately what is best for us and those we are praying for.

God will not give us anything that does not benefit us in eternity. As a result, there will be times when God will allow things we do not want (tragedy, sickness, suffering) to occur if he can turn that temporal (in a moment in time), earthly, pain into a greater eternal (for all time) good. God’s will for us will always be wiser and greater than our will for ourselves. Jesus himself demonstrated this when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane as we read in Matthew 26:29, “And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’” Notice, that Jesus was asking for the relief of the pain and suffering he knew was about to unfold, but he also recognized that his Father’s will is always the best plan so he prayed that the Father’s will be done

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us about this in CCC 2735-2741. Our prayers do not require “payment.” Our prayers of petition should be modelled on Jesus’ in the garden – it’s fine to ask God to relieve our pain and suffering and if that is the pathway to the greatest eternal good that request will be granted (we owe nothing for that). However, we should always ask that God’s will be done and that if he can not give us what we are asking for that he gives us the understanding to see how what he does give us or allows to occur can create the greatest possible eternal good.

The bottom line the only “promise” God wants us to fulfil is to continue to work to learn to love as he loves – both him and our neighbors. God does not demand payment for his gifts, nor does he withhold what we need for lack of “promised payment”. However, we must remember that it is not, “My will be done,” but rather, “THY will be done.” Once we mature in our prayer life so that our prayers are aligned with God’s providential will for us, we will have learned how depend on the one being that loves us more than any other and has the ability to lead us to become the best version of ourselves in this life and, more importantly, the next.

## Week of 09/18

### **Q: What do you think about psychic mediums?**

A: Rather than rebuild the wheel, I am going to quote extensively from this [ARTICLE](#) on Catholic.com.

“Necromancy is an attempt to gain information by conjuring the dead. The term is derived from the Greek words nekros (“dead person”) and manteia (“oracle, divination”). This practice, which was common in the ancient world, is forbidden in the

Old Testament: “There shall not be found among you . . . a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer” ([Deut. 18:10–11](#)).

The fact that necromancy was for purposes of gaining information is made clear by the Hebrew terms for “medium” (sho’el ’ob, “a spirit inquirer”), “wizard” (yidde’oni, “a spiritist”), and “necromancer” (doresh ’el-ha-metim, “an inquirer of the dead”). The focus on gaining information is also made clear by the context in Deuteronomy, which specifies that God will send his people prophets instead of allowing them to use mediums, wizards, and necromancers ([Deut. 18:15](#)).

Necromancy is forbidden today, as well. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to ‘unveil’ the future” ([CCC 2116](#)).

This [ARTICLE](#) further reinforces the need to stay away from psychics and mediums.

**Q: Do we reincarnate?**

A: No. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us in [CCC 1013](#), “Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When ‘the single course of our earthly life’ is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: ‘It is appointed for men to die once.’ There is no ‘reincarnation’ after death.” As we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, “...just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment...” ([Hebrews 9:27](#))

Now...if you would like a little more on reincarnation from both the faith and science perspective Jimmy Akin (Catholic Answers Senior Apologist) does a great job covering it in these two Mysterious World podcasts - [#275](#) and [#276](#).

**Q: Is the image we praise to a real image of God?**

A: Our Trinitarian God is three persons in one all powerful and all-knowing being. Up until the incarnation God had no physical form. When Jesus became incarnate the second person of the Trinity – the Son – took on a physical form which he retains today and will retain for eternity. However, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit remain purely spiritual beings. While, “...all creatures bear a certain resemblance to God...God transcends all creatures (and) we must therefore continually purify our language of everything in it that is limited, image bound or imperfect, if we are to not confuse our image of God – the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable – with our human representations.” (CCC 39-43)

Therefore, it is impossible for our finite minds to imagine how God would be perceived by us as our senses would on material objects and God is immaterial and transcendent. We do have physical representations of both the Father (a wise Old Man) and God the Holy Spirit (fire, dove) that represent their actions in our lives but clearly do not represent how we would sensibly experience them.

That said, we do have in the Shroud of Turin (what many believe to be the burial cloth of Christ – although not official Church teaching) an image of the God Man – Jesus. When God the Son

joined a human nature to his divine nature and took on human form, we were indeed given a sensible image of God we can look to and adore. The image from the Shroud has been used as the dominant image of Jesus since the 6<sup>th</sup> century re-discovery of the image of Edessa which is believed to be the Shroud of Turin. That image is below.



**Q: If Jesus is the Lamb of God and Mary is his Mother; does that mean that Mary had a little lamb?**

A: Strangely enough many believe that this nursery rhyme (and others) has a basis in Christianity. This [ARTICLE](#) highlights that. So not only does Mary have a little lamb but...

It's fleece was white as snow;

And everywhere that Mary went

The lamb was sure to go.

He followed her to school one day

Which was against the rule;

It made the children laugh and play,

To see a lamb at school.

And so the teacher turned him out,

But still he lingered near;

And waited patiently about

Till Mary did appear

"What makes the lamb love Mary so?"

The eager children cry;

"Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know,"

The teacher did reply.

**Q: I've always wondered how to discern when God is speaking to us, and so I looked it up and did some research. One of the methods that was cited a lot was to discern if what God supposedly says to you aligns with the Bible. With that, it is also believed that in the Bible, when God spoke to His people, it was not audible, rather a thought in their head essentially. This always confused me because it simply makes me then question how those in the Bible were able to discern God's voice if they didn't have the Bible to reference. So, I guess my question is how do we truly know when God is speaking to us, and how did those in the Bible know when God was speaking to them? Thanks!**

A: You are absolutely right in stating that one way to determine if it really is God's will you are "hearing" and not your own will (or the will of a demonic force) is to evaluate what you are hearing in light of Church teaching (Not just the Bible, but the entire deposit of faith found in the combination of Sacred Scripture and Oral Tradition). As for the encounters that we see people in the Bible having with God there are many examples in both the Old (e.g., Moses; Exodus 3:1-22) and New (e.g., Paul, Acts 9:1-7) Testaments of God physically manifesting in some way and / or audibly speaking to a human. Therefore, while it is rare, there are times when God or his designated messenger (e.g., Marian apparitions) makes himself present to our senses.

For most of us we will not have the opportunity to directly sense (using our five senses) God's presence / messages. That said, God does often work through others and the physical world around us. For example, you get that call from someone you haven't spoken to in ages that has a message that is directly associated with an issue we have been praying about or perhaps you notice something for the first time that you see every day but never noticed before that has a bearing on that issue.

For the Biblical authors there were times when God would speak very directly (e.g., the prophets) through visions, while for others they may not even have been aware of the Holy Spirit working within them to write no more or no less than God needed them to write. You can read about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in CCC 105-108.

Discerning God's will should always start with prayer (see CCC 2822-2827). Asking God to make his will clear is something we should all do, and prayer is the primary vehicle for doing so. Another, very useful practice is engaging the support of a Spiritual Director (See this brief ARTICLE) who, as an objective and experienced spiritual traveler, can help you filter out the "noise" and more effectively hear God's voice. In addition, this brief ARTICLE regarding discernment of spirits / spiritual messages may help you.

Like anything else learning how to identify and discern God's "voice" in your life is a skill you can and should work to cultivate. It is something that will grow over time as you "build the spiritual muscles" necessary to do so effectively.



**Q: How does the Jubilee plenary indulgence work? What are the intentions of the Pope and how do we pray them?**

A: This is such a popular question that we have prepared a document for it. It is embedded here.



Indulgence  
instructions\_V3.pdf

## Week of 09/11

**Q: Why was Jesus the only one that was dressed when he was crucified?**

A: Actually, Jesus would have been stripped naked for his crucifixion as that was the Roman custom. We actually read about that in [John 19:23-24](#), [Luke 23:33-34](#), [Mark 15:22-24](#), and [Matthew 27:33-35](#). We see him on the crucifix in Church with a small cloth around his waist but that is only out of a sense of modesty for the Church environment. He would not have been clothed in any way as part of crucifixion was the desire to place the individual being crucified in the most humiliating position possible.

**Q: If Jesus was Jewish why are we not Jewish?**

A: Jesus was certainly a devout Jew as were all his earliest followers (e.g., the Apostles). Jesus came first to bring salvation to the Jewish people (see [Matthew 15:24](#)). However, his plan all along was to bring all of humanity into the covenant relationship that God had been slowly expanding through revelation history – starting with a holy couple (Adam and Eve), then an extended family (Noah and his son's families), then a tribe (Abraham), then a nation (Moses), then a Kingdom of many nations (David and finally all nations and people (Jesus)).

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus gave us indications that His power and compassion reached to all people. He healed a Roman centurion's servant ([Luke 7:1-10](#)). He traveled through the Gentile region of the Gerasenes ([Mark 5:1](#)). He ministered in a Samaritan city (John 4). Jesus said He was the Good Shepherd, and He predicted that His flock would be greatly expanded (beyond the Jewish people): "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" ([John 10:16](#)).

The Jewish religious authorities did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and could not accept that people other than Jews could be included amongst God's "Chosen People." As a result, they rejected Jesus and many of the Jewish people followed the direction of their leaders. As a result, the early Christians were expelled from the Synagogues, and they began worshipping in private homes and outdoor spaces as a separate religion, distinct from the Jewish people.

In [Acts 10](#) we see Peter come to the realization that the Good Jews must be brought to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and Paul's ministry was almost exclusively to Gentiles. We see Christianity as the fulfillment of the covenant promises made to the Hebrew people. It is the extension of the Jewish faith to its pre-ordained and natural conclusion. We owe a great debt to the Jewish

people and hope that one day they can all recognize that Jesus is the Messiah and be able to experience the fullness of truth that is found in Catholic Christianity.

**Q: Is it bad that it is hard to say, “And with your spirit,” when one was raised saying, “And also with you.” For 30+ years?**

Change is hard especially when one learns to say something one way and then is told that it must be said differently. Making an occasional mistake out of habit is not “bad” but we should make every effort to express our liturgical responses using the proper form. One thing I find that helps with this is understanding why the change was made. The Roman Liturgical Rite was originally produced in Latin and then translated into various languages in use around the world. During the pontificate of Pope Saint John Paul II, the Vatican sought to update the translations of certain aspects of the Mass to make them a more accurate reflection of the original Latin. That is why the change was made – the words we say today are more closely aligned with the Liturgical Latin meaning that we are now more unified with the rest of the Body of Christ around the world through the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

**Q: Will the people who jumped from the twin towers on 9/11 go to heaven or is it considered suicide?**

There are really several considerations here. Let’s start with some basics... For someone to go to heaven they need to be in a state of grace at their death. This means they must be free of the guilt of mortal sin. The ordinary means of removing the guilt of mortal sin is sacramental confession (see [CCC 1422-1470](#)). However, if someone performs an act of perfect contrition (demonstrates sincere remorse out of a love of God) they can be returned to a state of grace. It is possible that if one is aware of their impending death, they could have that moment of perfect contrition. Since we cannot read one’s heart, we can only hope that this is the case for those who are in a state of mortal sin and are unable (for any reason) to receive sacramental reconciliation before their death.

The Catechism informs us that suicide is a grave/mortal sin when it states, “Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God.” ([CCC 2281](#)) However, the Catechism also informs us that, “Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.” ([CCC 2282](#)) Finally, the Catechism informs us that, “We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.” ([CCC 2283](#))

In order for a sin to be considered mortal it must be an action that involves grave matter, that an individual takes with full knowledge of its gravity and does so with deliberate consent (see [CCC 1857](#)). Clearly, those that were in the twin towers and were subjected to the horrors of that inferno were experiencing grave fear and hardship. As a result, it is reasonable to assume their culpability for choosing to end their lives was diminished. While their taking of their own lives

remains grave, they may not have committed a mortal sin in doing so as they were not in a position where they could be said to have freely chosen that path.

The bottom line is that assuming they were in a state of grace or had an experience of perfect contrition at the very end of their lives for any mortal sins that remained on their soul, we have reason to hope that they are indeed in heaven (or on their way if they required some purgation to remove attachment to sin before entering heaven). Unfortunately, since we have no way of knowing what is in one's heart at the moment of their death we can only hope and not know for sure.

**Q: Why must reconciliation be done directly with a priest? Is it not enough to talk directly with God and confess your sins directly to him?**

A: This is a REALLY important question. I want to start off by stating that when we recognize our sins the very first thing we should do is ask for God's forgiveness. If we have perfect contrition – we detest our sin, have eliminated any attachment to that sin and vow to never commit it again because of our love of God and a sincere desire to not offend the one we love most, even our most grave sins are indeed forgiven. (NOTE: if our desire to not sin again is motivated by a fear of hell that is imperfect contrition and not effective – see [CCC 1451-1454](#)) However, Jesus recognizes that as broken humans it is not easy for us to actually achieve the detachment from the sins we are attracted to. He also recognized that as beings that are combination physical and material it is difficult for us to be confident in God's forgiveness without a sensible (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) sign. This is why Jesus (not the Church) established all of the Sacraments so that they have a visible / sensible sign of his invisible grace.

Jesus established the sacrament of penance on Easter Sunday night when he says, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ([John 20:21-23](#)) In this context "Peace" means forgiveness. He starts by forgiving them of their sins (e.g., abandoning him, denying him) and then lets them know that just as he was sent to reconcile man to God, he is sending his Apostles (our first Bishops and Priests) to do that for the world. He is then very specific that he is granting them the ability to "forgive" or "retain" the sins of others. Of course, in order to determine if one's sins should be forgiven or retained, one must actually be aware of them. This is why we must share our sins with a Priest who, through the sacrament of Holy orders is able to act "in persona Christi" (in the person of Christ).

This is why the sacrament of penance is the ordinary means by which our sins are forgiven (SEE [1422-1498](#) – EVERYONE SHOULD READ THIS SECTION OF THE CCC!). In approaching God humbly, through the confession process we are not just acknowledging our sins, but we are doing so in recognition of our need for God's grace to help us overcome our attraction to sin. We are recognizing that God is God, and we are not. We are also recognizing that God established a

visible Church and endowed it with the power to bind and loose (see [Matthew 16:18-19](#) and [18:18](#)) for its members. By choosing to reject the system Jesus established to build his kingdom in his absence, we are rejecting God Himself. As Jesus said his disciples, “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” ([Luke 10:16](#))

The bottom line is that MANY Catholics have decided that they know better than Jesus and reject the sacrament he established and the authority he provided to the Church in relation to sacramental confession. We must decide – we are either disciples of Christ and are all in or we are not. We do not get to pick and choose the elements we like and reject those that humble us, scare us, or would require a change in our lives and the giving up of something that is sinful that we are attracted to.

**Q: Can a person continue to participate and receive communion, if civilly married, had the marriage blessed by the Catholic Church, and then divorced years later?**

A: Divorce is not a sin. While the Church teaches that a valid marriage bond cannot be broken, it also recognizes that in certain cases divorce is the only way forward for a married couple to ensure the safety and financial stability of one or both spouses and any children involved (See CCC 2383). However, even in such a case, if the parties were validly married, they remain married in the eyes of the Church and are not free to marry again. In order to be free to marry again one would need to demonstrate that the first marriage was not valid at the point at which it was entered into / attempted – see [answer below in week 08/28](#) for more on that.

If a divorced, but still validly married person attempts another civil marriage that would be a sin as he/she would be engaging in an adulterous union. Equally problematic would be any other use of one’s sexual powers outside of the bond of marriage (e.g., fornication) – See CCC 2387-2391 and 2351-2359.

The bottom line is that divorce is not a mortal sin and under certain conditions would be recommended as an action to be taken by a validly married couple (although divorce is highly destructive in society – See CCC 2384-2385). As long as a divorced person is not in a state of mortal sin (they are in a state of grace) they can and should approach for communion to access the healing, strengthening, transformation and unification the reception of that great sacrament provides.

**Q: What is the difference between proselytism (bad) and Evangelization (good)? And which one was St. Boniface engaged in.**

A: Proselytism and evangelization are two distinct concepts within the Catholic Church. Proselytism refers to the act of attempting to convert someone to a different religion, while evangelization refers to the act of spreading the Christian gospel.

Proselytism is often seen as a negative term because it implies coercion or manipulation in trying to convert others to a different faith. It can involve aggressive or forceful tactics that do

not respect the freedom and dignity of the person being approached. The Catholic Church discourages proselytism and instead promotes a respectful and dialogue-based approach to engaging with people of different beliefs.

On the other hand, evangelization is an essential mission of the Church, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is the act of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and inviting others to encounter Him. Evangelization is not about forcing or manipulating others to convert, but rather about sharing the love and truth of Christ in a way that respects the freedom and dignity of each person. It is a call for all baptized Christians to be agents of evangelization, sharing their personal encounter with Christ and inviting others to experience the same joy and hope.

In summary, the main difference between proselytism and evangelization lies in their approach and intention. Proselytism involves attempting to convert someone to a different religion through forceful or manipulative means, while evangelization is about spreading the Christian gospel through respectful dialogue and sharing the love of Christ with others.

As for St. Boniface ...from all accounts he was an excellent evangelizer. If one wants to call his legendary downing of the Donar Oak proselytizing, it's an argument that could be made. However, demonstrating the falsehood of something as a means of shining the light on the truth of the Gospel is not proselytizing. It's demonstrating the truth and those to whom it was demonstrated could still choose to reject it. He was not forcing them to convert - he was helping them (at great personal risk) see the folly of worshipping a tree as a god while offering them a much more rational alternative. All evangelizers want others to convert (if they truly love them); they just avoid manipulation and coercion in doing so. Demonstrating a truth at great personal risk would not be considered coercion and hence would not be proselytizing.

## Week of 09/04

**Q: Hi! I was just wondering what the best way to start reading the Bible is? Start with the Old Testament or the New? Do you prefer we just follow along with the presentations in class as you teach it, or is it best to start reading the Bible daily in order to receive the most benefit from each class? I'm very new to religion in general, and love to read, but I'm unsure where I should start. Thank you in advance for your response.**

A: The Bible is a compilation of 73 books broken down into 46 books in the Old Testament (the Old Covenants of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David) and 27 books in the New Testament (the New & Eternal Covenant of Jesus). This library of books was written by >40 different authors over a span of ~1,400 years from 3,400 to 2,000 years ago. It is written using a variety of genres (allegory, poetry, history, historical fiction, fiction, etc...) and often references things, practices, and places that no longer exist or have been forgotten. As a result, it can often be quite confusing for someone unfamiliar with the Christian faith.

I always recommend that those new to the Bible start with the Gospel of Luke. It is written as a brief history of Jesus' ministry on earth and is written in chronological order in the Greek tradition. Other histories of that age would normally be organized by where events occurred or by theme. As a result, Luke is most like a story we would read today with a linear timeline. After reading Luke, I would then recommend reading the Gospel of John following by the Gospels of

Matthew and Luke. I would then pick up with the Acts of the Apostles and the balance of the New Testament letters to get an overview of Christian beliefs and some insights into the challenges facing Christians in the first century of the Church.

Only after completing the New Testament would I go back to the Old Testament. I would read Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. You could then go back and fill in the rest from beginning to end of the Old Testament. What you find in the Old Testament is all that was done to prepare for the ultimate arrival of Christ.

If you are a podcast person, I would highly recommend the Father Mike Schmitz, "Bible in a Year" podcast. This way you can hear both the Bible and a commentary providing you with valuable contextual explanations that will make it understandable. Start on day one and progress as you can – don't get hung up on having to do an episode each day – you could skip days or do multiple episodes at one time as time permits. As long as you do them in order it will make the Bible understandable as one unified story of Jesus Christ from beginning to end.

I hope that helps.

#### **Q: How many people believe in God?**

A: There are approximately 7.7 billion people on the planet. When you ask how many believe in God, I am assuming you mean the one God of Abraham who is the Father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. If that is the case, there are:

- 2.4 billion Christians: (31.1% of the World's population; ~1.6 billion of these 2.4 billion are Catholics, the rest are part of one of the handful of mainline Protestant denominations/Sub denomination – Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, etc... that splintered from Catholicism in the 16th century, are associated with one of the thousands of evangelical Christians communities that emerged in the last 200 years or are Orthodox [splintered from Catholicism in the 11th century]. Catholicism is by far the largest and also the oldest [originating in the 1st century] - Christian community.)
- ~1.9 billion Muslims (24.9 % of the World's population)
- ~156 million Jews (0.2% of the World's population)
- Other Regions that Do Not Believe in a Single God Include
  - Hindus ~1.2 billion (15.2% of the World's population)
  - Buddhists ~500 million (6.6% of the World's population)
  - Followers of Indigenous Religions ~400 million (5.2% of the World's population)
- That gives us about 56% of the world believing in the one God, another 27% believing in some form of higher power(s) and about 17% who are either Atheist (do not believe in any form of God(s) or supernatural force(s)) or Agnostic (do not have a fixed opinion on the existence of a higher power or non-material force that influences the material world).

**Q: What does baptism do spiritually? And is the spiritual significance all that is important for salvation?**

There are really two questions here. I want to start with the second one. When you ask if Baptism is, "...all that is important for salvation" the answer is "No," if by "all" you mean the only thing necessary. However, Baptism is the gateway through which we pass to gain entry into Christ's body and is required for our initial justification ([CCC 1266-1267](#)). The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church, and made sharers in her mission." ([CCC 1213](#)) Yet, passing through that gateway is no guarantee of salvation – the brokenness of our nature allows us to choose against the good and, if that choice leads us into mortal sin, we can lose our salvation. Through the sacrament of Penance, we can regain our salvation and through the great sacrament of Holy Communion we can be healed (of venial sin), strengthened (against sin), transformed (to be more Christlike) and unified (to Christ and the other members of his Body).

Without passing through the "gateway" via Baptism salvation is not open to us. As Peter tells us, "Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." ([1 Peter 3:21](#)) The Catechism makes this clear as well when it says, "The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation ([John 3:5](#)). He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them ([Matthew 28:18-19](#)). Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament ([Mark 16:16](#)). The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude." ([CCC 1257](#)) However, the Church also holds that, "Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity." ([CCC 1260](#))

Our Salvation is a journey, not a one-time event. This short [ARTICLE](#) does a nice job of explaining the nature of this journey that begins with Baptism, but continues for the balance of our post-baptismal lives. If you prefer a slightly longer audio explanation of the Catholic doctrine of salvation Jimmy Akin does a great job with it [HERE](#).

**Q: Why did God need to change the covenant when Jesus came? Why couldn't the new covenant suffice since Moses?**

A: The answer is tied to God's plan of gradual revelation and salvation for all. There are actually a series of covenants that God created with humanity. A covenant is a means of bringing someone into a familial relationship through, and throughout revelation history God was slowly revealing himself (as we were growing intellectually, morally, socially and could understand it), he was also expanding the breadth of his covenants.

1. Adam & Eve: A Holy Couple
2. Noah: A Holy Family

3. Abraham: A Holy Tribe
4. Moses: A Holy Nation
5. David: A Holy Kingdom
6. Jesus: One Holy, Catholic, & Apostolic Church

The Mosaic covenant was limited to the people of Israel and was designed to help them grow as sons and daughters of God so they would be able to bring the knowledge of God to the rest of humanity. The Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel both foresaw that a new, expanded and more perfect covenant (based upon a perfect sacrifice), would be coming in [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) and [Ezekiel 37:26](#). Ultimately, the entire book of Malachi is pointing to the need for this new covenant. As a result, it was no surprise when Jesus announced that the new covenant was at hand (see [Luke 22:19-20](#)) at the Last Supper.

The bottom line is that the Mosaic covenant along with the Davidic covenant that followed it were both imperfect and incomplete. They were not capable of bringing all humanity into full communion with our Trinitarian God so that we could realize our destiny of becoming his beloved adopted sons and daughters; capable of living with him for all eternity. They were essential steppingstones in humanity's path towards full communion with God that needed the perfect and pure sacrifice of Jesus and the establishment of the new and everlasting covenant for the journey to be completed.

## Week of 08/28

**Q: If my husband was not faithful in our marriage do I still have an obligation to stay married and faithful to him in the eyes of the church?**

A: The Catholic Church relies on the words of Jesus when he said, "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that ever one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (Matthew 5:31-32). The Greek word that we translate into "unchastity" in English refers to marriages that were not legally marriages because they were either within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity (Lev 18:6-16) or contracted with a Gentile. We see this teaching against divorce replicated in Luke 16:18, Mark 10:11-12, Matthew 19:4-9 (Jesus is very clear here) and in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he writes, "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband—and that the husband should not divorce his wife."

This is the basis of the Catholic teaches that valid marriages are permanent. It is also the basis for the annulment process where the Church will be asked to analyze a marriage to determine if, at the time it was entered into, the marriage was valid. The Church does recognize that some marriages were not validly entered into, and hence can be declared "null" – the marriage never existed - and the parties would be free to separate and marry others. You can read about that in a previous answer [HERE](#).

All that said, when a spouse breaks the marital bond and violates the trust that is necessary for love to flourish, it can prove to be difficult to overcome. Forgiveness itself may prove to be



difficult, but even after one forgives, re-establishing that trust will take time and effort. The effort needs to be made by the spouse that violated the trust. Your husband will need to change and go out of his way to do the things that are necessary for you to begin to rebuild that trust. The first step may need to be to get some counseling from a priest or licensed Catholic marriage therapist. There must be a discussion that includes recognition of responsibility for the violation of trust and a commitment to rebuild the relationship.

The bottom line is that the Church takes the marriage vows seriously (e.g., for better or worse; to death do you part) and does not recognize the validity of civil divorce ending a valid marriage. The Church does recognize that there are times when divorce is necessary for the safety (physical, mental, financial) of one spouse and / or children. Yet, if the marriage was validly entered into, the church considers the parties married until one of the spouses dies. A civilly divorced but validly married couple will be required to live a life of chastity and remain single to avoid falling into a state of mortal sin and separation from God's grace.

**Q: What do the symbols mean on the brick wall inside the Church next to the cross?**

A: There are three gold symbols that you will see on that wall. On the left of the cross (as you face it) you will find what are known as the Fleur-de-lis. The fleur-de-lis, also spelled fleur-de-lys, is a common heraldic charge in the shape of a lily. In Christianity, lilies symbolize purity and chastity, which is why the fleur-de-lis historically is used to represent the Virgin Mary. In the center (above and below the crucifix) you find a cross surrounded by four crosses. This is known as the Jerusalem cross - it was used as the emblem and coat of arms of the Kingdom of Jerusalem from the 1280s. The symbolism of the five-fold cross is variously given as the Five Wounds of Christ, Christ and the four evangelists, or Christ and the four quarters of the world. On the right of the cross you find a small tree or plant with four leaves with another small tree or plant with four leaves growing out of it. This is most likely a crude symbol of the tree of life. Saint Albert the Great taught that the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, is the Fruit of the Tree of Life in which case it is a clear representation of Jesus and the sacrifice he made on the cross. Other great theologians (e.g., Augustine of Hippo) speculated that the tree of life we hear about in Genesis is actually Jesus himself – the source of eternal life for humanity.

**Q: Is being gay a sin?**

A: We are all attracted to things that are not good for our eternal lives or which violate God's design for humanity. Each of us struggles with different attractions and our challenge is to learn how to govern our passions to achieve self-mastery and overcome our sinful desires. The attraction to sin is not sin. Acting out on that attraction and allowing our distorted passions to overcome our reason is a sin. Whether it is a married man acting out on his attraction to a neighbor's wife, a young heterosexual couple engaging in fornication (sex outside of a sacramental marriage), or a same sex attracted person engaging in sexual acts they are all equally sinful.

Two people of the same sex can not physically engage in intercourse as our reproduction systems only fit together one way. We can simulate intercourse between two people of the same sex, but that requires abuses of our other systems (e.g., digestive) to violate God's design. The Catechism of the Catholic Church informs us that, "...homosexual acts are intrinsically

disordered (violate God's design for humanity)." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved." (CCC 2357)

However, the Catechism also informs us that, "the number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity (just like everyone else attracted to sin). Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition." (CCC 2358) This is why there are organizations sponsored by the Church like Courage (<https://couragerc.org/>) which is actually led in our Diocese by our own Pastor – Father Sy Nguyen. Courage seeks to support those Catholics that are same sex attracted but want to be intentional disciples of Christ.

**Q: What is the exact location of the first Church?**

A: That is an interesting question that has no definitive answer. Christianity began in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:1-47) on Pentecost ~ AD 33. Initially, Christians met and practiced their faith in the Jewish synagogues as they were viewed as another one of several Jewish sects. Over time, they were pushed out of the synagogues and Christians met in "house churches" (see Acts 20:7-12). Eventually, when the Roman empire realized that Christianity was not a Jewish sect the practice of the faith was outlawed so worship services moved "underground." In Rome, for example, Christians literally met underground in that the catacombs were used for Mass and other Christian gatherings. It was not until Christianity was legalized in AD 313 that public Churches were built in earnest and were recognized as legitimate places of worship within the Roman empire. Some of the earliest Churches were commissioned by the Roman emperor Constantine who in some instances converted structures that were previously temples for pagan Gods and in others built grand structures to serve as Catholic churches.

**Q: What can I do so God can forgive me for my sin?**

A: The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) teaches us everything we need to know about what it takes to be forgiven by God. We need to recognize our sin, express true contrition for it (we detest it and sincerely strive to never do it again) and ask for God's forgiveness. As soon as we move in this direction, God comes running to us. He is simply waiting for us to seek forgiveness. Jesus gave us the great sacrament of reconciliation (see John 20:19-23) so that we can sensibly (hear it) experience that forgiveness for our most serious sins. The bottom line is there is nothing you can do to "unson" or "undaughter" yourself from God except refuse to believe that he can indeed forgive you.

**Q: How does God talk to you? People say through prayer, but what does that mean? Through your thoughts?**

A: God communicates with us in various ways including:

1. Sacred Scripture: God primarily communicates with us through His Word, which is revealed in Sacred Scripture. The Bible is considered the inspired and written Word of God,

- containing His teachings, guidance, and messages for humanity. Through reading and meditating on Scripture, we can encounter God's voice and His plan for our lives.
2. Tradition: God also speaks to us through the living Tradition of the Church. This includes the teachings, practices, and wisdom that have been passed down through the generations from the apostles. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, interprets and transmits the deposit of faith, ensuring that the Word of God remains alive and relevant in every age.
  3. Prayer: God communicates with us through prayer, which is a dialogue between us and Him. In prayer, we can speak to God and listen to His voice. Through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, God can guide and inspire us, providing insights, comfort, and direction.
  4. Creation and Natural Law: God's presence and communication can be perceived in the beauty and order of creation. The natural world reflects God's wisdom and reveals aspects of His character. Additionally, God has written His moral law on the human heart, enabling us to discern right from wrong and guiding us in our conscience.
  5. Events and Circumstances: God can also speak to us through the events and circumstances of our lives. He can use situations, encounters, and even challenges to guide us, teach us, and draw us closer to Him. Through the discernment of spirits, we can seek to understand how God may be speaking to us in the events of our lives.

It is important to note that God's communication is personal and unique to each individual. While these are general ways in which God speaks to us, the manner and form of His communication can vary from person to person. It is essential to cultivate a relationship with God, seeking to listen attentively and respond to His voice with faith and openness.

Many struggle to "hear" God and/or recognize when he puts events or people in our lives in response to us. It can take some time and effort to cultivate this ability. Some of our greatest saints (e.g. Mother Teresa) have shared that for extended periods (months, years, decades) that they struggled to hear God's voice. If you are experiencing this pray that God will give you the grace to more readily recognize his communications with you through all of the methods above.

**Q: How can God forgive our sins?**

A: Just as we can forgive someone who has hurt us in some way, God can certainly forgive us for choosing against him. God loves us as the perfect Father. Parents regularly forgive their children for offenses against them because of that type of love (which is but a shadow of the love God has for us). God gave us the ability to have our most serious sins forgiven in the great sacrament of Penance (A.K.A. reconciliation, confession, etc..). The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that, "Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion." (CCC 1422) The Catechism has an excellent section on the sacrament of Penance that can be found in CCC 1420-1498.

**Q: Throughout OCIA, there have been a couple of mentions that Catholicism was the only form of Christianity until 1517. Does this mean the Eastern Orthodox and Coptic Christian Churches, both of which predate Protestantism, are recognized as part of the Catholic Church even if they are not currently in communion with the Pope?**

A: That's a good catch. The Eastern Churches that have not yet resumed full communion with the Catholic Church (23 have) are not considered part of the Catholic Communion. They do have valid apostolic succession and hence a valid priesthood. They also have valid sacraments. With some fairly minor theological differences we share the same faith. Over the last 100 years or so we have come to realize (both sides) that those differences are not as significant as once perceived. That said, you are correct they are technically not Catholic so you will have non-Catholic Christians as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century after the council of Chalcedon when the first small churches no longer recognized papal authority. The majority of the Orthodox first broke away officially in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (the Eastern Orthodox and Latin churches mutually excommunicated each other) and except for a brief return in the 15<sup>th</sup> century they have remained separated. They recognize the Bishop of Rome (the pope) as the first amongst equals, but they do not recognize his ultimate authority over the other ancient Patriarchies. Many of the Eastern Churches have returned to full communion over the years but the largest of them – Greek and Russian Orthodox have not. However, we have high hopes that some day what are considered the two “lungs of the Church” will reunite. Unlike the Protestants who do not have apostolic succession or valid sacraments (outside of Baptism and Matrimony) and who also have major theological differences with Catholicism, the Orthodox Churches are essentially identical in their belief systems.

**Q: How does one defend the questioning of the Catholic Church when outsiders point out scandal cover ups within the church? Of course, the scandals they point out are the various sex scandals that make headlines.**

A: This is a great question and one that every Catholic should have a reasonable answer for. I would like to start by recognizing a reality, “The Church, from the very beginning and at every point in its development, has been marked to varying degrees by sin, scandal, stupidity, misbehavior, misfortune, and wickedness.” (Barron, Robert; Letter to a Suffering Church). The Church is composed of humans and all humans are broken to varying degrees. That means that there will be humans in the Church that fail miserably and commit grave evils. There always has been such people in the Church and there always will be. Jesus himself selected a betrayer (Judas), a denier (Peter) and a doubter (Thomas) to be amongst his inner circle. Moses was a murderer and King David was an adulterer, yet God selected them to implement his divine plan despite their human failings.

We don't leave Jesus and the Church he founded because of Judas. As Saint Paul tells us, “...we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves...” (2 Corinthians 4:7) and as Bishop Barron points out, “The Vessels are all fragile and many of them are downright broken’ but we don't stay because of the vessels. We stay because of the treasure.” Jesus never promised the Church would be perfect. He promised it would never fail (Matthew 16:18) and for the last 2,000 years that promise has been kept.

When people question the Catholic Church they are right in doing so. We should hold the Church and its leaders to a higher standard. That said, we must also keep in mind the words of wisdom that C. K. Chesterton offers us when he states, “When people impute special vices to the Christian Church, they seem entirely to forget that the world has these vices much more.

The Church has been cruel; but the world has been much crueler. The Church has plotted; but the world has plotted much more. The Church has been superstitious; but it has never been so superstitious as the world is when left to itself. The world will do all that is has ever accused the Church of doing and do it much worse, and do it on a much larger scale, and do it without any standards for a return to sanity or any motives for a movement of repentance.”

There are two lessons we all must keep in mind when considering the many failings of the men and women within the Church over the last 2,000 years:

Lesson 1: While we can never minimize the horrors of victims of Church scandal, we can thank God that they come to light and that we, the faithful, are encouraged (not suppressed) to continue to highlight them, hold the church accountable and help restore it. Across the history of Church scandal God has consistently raised up brave men and women to drive reform and repair.

Lesson 2: We should not allow ourselves to become the farmers that burned down the barn to get rid of the rats. We need to fight for Christ’s Church as members of the Church Militant, not abandon it to its enemies because some of them have found their way inside it’s walls.

I would like to end this response with a quote from Hillaire Belloc, the Franco-English writer and historian of the early twentieth century. Belloc was also an orator, poet, sailor, satirist, writer of letters, soldier, and political activist who offered this statement about the Church, “The Catholic Church is an institution I am bound to hold divine – but for the unbelievers a proof of its divinity might be found in the fact that no merely human institution conducted with such knavish imbecility would have lasted a fortnight.”

**Q: How to know if a person is under the influence of demonic forces?**

A: It is a serious one and I hope that you are not facing a potential situation like this now. The Catholic Church recognizes the reality of demonic possession and the influence of evil spirits and you can read about that in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraphs CCC 391-395. However, the Church does not provide specific criteria or a detailed guide on how to determine if a person is under the influence of demonic forces.

In general, signs that may indicate the presence of demonic influence can include, but is not limited to:

- Extraordinary strength or abilities beyond natural human capacity.
- Speaking in languages unknown to the person.
- Knowledge of hidden or personal information that the person could not have known.
- Aversion to sacred objects or religious symbols.
- Extreme aversion or reaction to prayer or religious rituals.
- Exhibiting violent or aggressive behavior.

However, it is crucial to remember that these signs alone are not sufficient to determine the presence of demonic influence. It is essential to seek the guidance of a qualified priest who can

discern the situation through prayer, spiritual discernment, and consultation with the Church authorities.

The Church emphasizes the importance of approaching cases of alleged demonic influence with caution and prudence. The Catechism states that "before an exorcism is performed, it is important to ascertain that one is dealing with the presence of the Evil One, and not an illness" (CCC 1673). This highlights the need for a careful evaluation of the person's condition to rule out any physical or psychological causes.

The Church's approach to cases of alleged possession involves a thorough investigation, medical and psychological assessments, and pastoral care. The objective is to start by ruling out natural causes for the perceived problems. It is important to note that the discernment of demonic influence is a delicate matter and should not be undertaken by individuals without the necessary authority, training, and guidance from the Church. Canon Law also clearly states that only a Priest specifically trained and authorized by the local Bishop may perform an assessment and exorcism. (Canon 1172)

I hope all this helps. Please be careful. If you are all concerned it would be best to consult with your Pastor as soon as possible so the basic assessments can be made.

## Week of 08/21

**Q: My question is as follows: Can a person get married again by the catholic church in CA with someone else if that person was previously married by the catholic church in CA and they got divorced through the court?**

A: The Catholic Church does not recognize a civil divorce as a termination of a marriage that was validly entered into in any state or country. A valid marriage bond remains intact until death of one of those who entered into that bond. Only upon the death of one's spouse would a validly married person (Catholic or not) be free to enter into another marriage.

That said, the Church does recognize divorce as a necessary option when the physical, mental, or financial health of a spouse and/or children can only be preserved by this option. However, the Church does not see this as the termination of a valid marital bond so the parties would not be free to marry again.

That said, the Church also recognizes that not all marriages were valid at the point in time they were entered into. If a Baptized Catholic did not get married using the proper form (e.g., married outside the Catholic Church without the Bishop's dispensation) the marriage would be invalid. If one or both of the spouses was forced or coerced into the marriage it would not be valid. If one or both of the spouses did not intend to remain faithful or remain open to the prospect of life (children) it would not be valid. If one or both of the spouses deliberately withheld information that that would have needed to be known by the other (e.g., one of the spouses had \$10 million in gambling debt that he / she did not disclose) it would not be valid.

If one believes that their marriage could have been invalid, he / she can pursue a declaration of nullity through a Diocesan tribunal. This process – commonly known as the annulment process – investigates the marriage at the point it was engaged in to determine if it was valid. If the

tribunal determines that it was not valid, a declaration of nullity will be issued, and the individuals are free to attempt marriage once again. The best place to start is making an appointment to speak to a parish priest about the possibility of annulment.

**Q: Why have many parishes added the prayer to St Michael the archangel after mass?**

A: The simple answer is that Bishop has the ability to modify the liturgical practices of the parishes in his diocese (within certain limits). A pastor of a parish has similar abilities within his parish and with the full knowledge of the Bishop. The praying of the St. Michael prayer during the celebration of Mass was at one time quite common but has fallen out of favor in recent decades.

More and more parishes and diocese are bringing the practice back due to various factors including but not limited to:

- Defense against the Devil: St. Michael the Archangel is traditionally regarded as the defender against Satan and the leader of the heavenly armies. By praying the St. Michael Prayer, individuals and communities express their trust in St. Michael's intercession and seek his help in combating the temptations and attacks of the devil.
- Tradition and Devotion: The St. Michael Prayer has a long history in Catholic tradition. It was composed by Pope Leo XIII in 1886 and was originally prayed after Masses as a means of seeking protection for the Church. Over time, devotion to St. Michael and the prayer itself spread among the faithful, and it has become a popular prayer in many Catholic communities.
- Renewed Focus on Spiritual Battle: In recent years, there has been a renewed emphasis on the reality of spiritual warfare and the need for spiritual protection in our culture. Some parishes may introduce the St. Michael Prayer as part of this renewed focus, encouraging the faithful to be aware of the spiritual battle and to seek the intercession of St. Michael.

Once again, it is important to note that the decision to pray the St. Michael Prayer in a parish may vary from one community to another. Some parishes may choose to incorporate it into their liturgical or devotional practices, while others may not. Ultimately, the decision is made by the parish leadership in consultation with the pastor and in accordance with the needs and spiritual traditions of the community. Of course, if the local Bishop requests its inclusion that trumps any parish decision that may have been made.

**Q: What is a woman had a medically necessary abortion?**

A: The Church teaching on abortion is clear. Abortion is an intrinsic evil that is morally wrong in every circumstance and is one of the few mortal sins that comes with automatic excommunication. You can review the complete Church teaching on abortion in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraphs CCC 2270-2275.

However, the Church also recognizes what is known as, "The Principle of Double Effect." This principle basically states that an action that has two effects (one good, one bad) is permissible if:

- The act itself is not intrinsically wrong.
- The person acting intends only the good effect and would avoid the bad effect if possible.
- The good effect cannot be caused because of the bad effect.
- The good effect must be in proportion to the bad effect.

This principle applies here. If, in the course, of saving the mother's life (e.g., her fallopian tube must be removed because she has an ectopic pregnancy) the child she is carrying dies we know that the act of saving the mother's life was not intrinsically wrong as only the good of saving the mother was intended and everything was done to save the child as well. At the same time, saving the mother's life did not result from terminating the life of the child. The child died because action was taken to save the mother's life and that was clearly a proportional effect as the mother's and child's life are equally sacred.

The key is understanding that there is no such thing as a medically necessary abortion. There are actions that are medically necessary to save one's life that can result in the death of an unborn child, but nevertheless remains morally permissible.

**Q: Why would an all-good God condemn one of his beloved sons or daughters to hell?**

A: The key is understanding that God does not send anyone to hell. Individuals choose eternal separation from God (that is what the primary pain of hell is – see CCC 1035, CCC 1033-1037 is a great summary). Theologians speculate (not official Church teaching) that for someone who dies rejecting God it would be more painful for them to be in God's presence than to be separated from it. It may be that hell is little more than the most merciful solution to the problem of God's creatures choosing to reject Him. God maintains his children in existence because he would never want to simply annihilate them. God never stops loving those that choose hell over him even though they have rejected him.

Week of 08/07 & 08/14

**Q: Can I get married through the Catholic Church without getting the government involved?**

A: In order to be married in a Catholic Church in the United States you must obtain a marriage license from the government authority associated with the jurisdiction you intend to be married in (usually the country clerk's office). However, you do not need to be a citizen or green card holder to obtain that license. This link will provide you with the instructions to obtain that license in Orange County => <https://www.ocrecorder.com/services/marriage-services>

**Q: Question regarding papal primacy. I heard once a story that while the John the Apostle was still living, some Christians approached him to settle a religious question. But instead he directed them to the pope, who by that time was a successor of St. Peter, as the individual with authority to settle the question. If true, this would seem to be an enormous bolster to the Catholic teaching on papal primacy. Have you heard of this and if so what is the level of historical support for it?**



A: I have heard this before, but I am not aware of reliable documentation of this event so I would need to consider it Pius tradition. That said, we do have a record of the Church in Corinth appealing to the Pope (bishop of Rome) to resolve an issue in the late first century when the apostle John was still alive and in Ephesus which was much closer to Corinth than Rome. If they were simply looking for some advice as opposed to a definitive decision, they could have appealed to John.

The Popes following Peter were, in order, Linus, Anacletus and then Clement. Around the year AD 95 Clement writes a letter to the Church in Corinth to settle a dispute that was raging about their clergy (the validly assigned clergy had been deposed and replaced). Clement begins the letter by apologizing for the lateness of his reply indicating that the Church in Corinth had appealed to his authority to begin with. He then goes on to describe the actions taken to rebel against the legitimate clergy as “shameful and detestable” (You can read more about Clement and his letter [HERE](#)) and directs them to reinstall the validly empowered members of the clergy.

For some time, this letter was widely read as if it was scripture in the early Church much like the first and second letters of Peter which did end up in the Canon of the Bible. This practice attests to the level of respect that was due the Bishop of Rome as the successor to Peter. This [ARTICLE](#) will provide some more information about the Papacy in the early Church along with the flaws in the arguments disputing it. It’s a quick read that is quite informative. Its author, Joe Heschmeyer wrote a book on this topic entitled, *Pope Peter: Defending the Church’s Most Distinctive Teaching in a Time of Crisis* (Catholic Answers Press; San Diego, CA; 2020) that digs into this topic in easily readable detail. If you are looking for even more, there is a great book written by Erick Ybarra entitled, *The Papacy: Revisiting the Debate Between Catholics and Orthodox* (Emmaus Road Publishing; Steubenville, OH; 2022) which provide an incredible amount of detail about the understanding of the papacy from the first century onward.

**Q: Hello. An ex-Mormon told me about how Mormons believe in the succession of different lines of priesthood: Aaron and Melchizedek. Now, I think we have the line of Melchizedek if I understood Fr. Mike Schmitz correctly, but do we still retain the Aaronic priesthood as well? In other words: are New Covenant priests ordained in the line of both Melchizedek and Aaron, or of Melchizedek alone; and if the latter; what happened to the Aaronic priesthood? Thank you, and God bless you.**

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A: Let’s start with the basics of what a priest does – he offers sacrifice on behalf of himself, his family and/or his people - and a little history of the evolution of the Israelite priesthood Per this [ARTICLE](#) in the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#):

“In the age of the Patriarchs the offering of sacrifices was the function of the father or head of the family (cf. Genesis 8:20; 12:7, etc.; Job 1:5). But, even before Moses, there were also regular priests, who were not fathers of family (cf. Exodus 19:22 sqq.)...t his pre-Mosaic priesthood was established by God Himself and made hereditary in the family of Manasses, but was subsequently abolished in punishment of the worship of the golden calf (cf. Exodus 32:26 sqq.)....It was only after the Sinaitical legislation that the Israelitic priesthood became a special class in the community. From the tribe of Levi Jahweh chose the house of Aaron to discharge permanently and exclusively all the religious functions; Aaron himself and later the first-born of his family was to stand at the head of this priesthood as high-priest, while the other [Levites](#) were to act, not as priests, but as assistants and servants. The solemn consecration of the Aaronites to the priesthood took place at the same time as the anointing of Aaron as high-priest and with almost the same ceremonial (Exodus 29:1-37; 40:12 sqq.; Leviticus 8:1-36). This single consecration included that of all the future descendants of the priests, so that the priesthood was fixed in the house of [Aaron](#) by mere descent, and was thus hereditary.”

Unfortunately, after the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian captivity there was no place to offer sacrifice and the Levitical priesthood faltered. Following the return from Babylon and the reconstruction of the temple, the Levitical priesthood was reestablished, but it was unclear if the hereditary lines were clearly maintained. At the same time, during the Maccabean revolt the Maccabees themselves took on the position of High priest and King clearly violating both the Levitical line of priests and Davidic lines of kings. Even though there was an attempt to restore the Levitical line again following this period, following the destruction of the second temple in AD 70 there was a clear end to the Levitical priesthood as there was no longer remains a temple in which to offer sacrifice.

The Christian priesthood was modelled upon the Levitical priesthood – with a High priest, Jesus, who offered and continues to offer the sacrifice of himself for our sins; and ministerial priests serving in his person in the Churches around the world. However, this was not a continuation of the line of Aaron. There are no hereditary lines in the Christian priesthood.

When we turn to [Melchizedek](#) we find our first mention of him in [Genesis 14:18-20](#) that tells us that following Abram’s successful battle with the kings to save his nephew, Lot, that, “Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram and said, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’ And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.” Clearly this event is long before the institution of the Levitical priesthood and what we have in Melchizedek is a Priest-King as Melchizedek was the king of Salem (later to be known as Jerusalem). While we also see Melchizedek mentioned in [Psalm 110:4](#), he is referenced in the New Testament as a type or precursor to the new Priest-King, Jesus. We see this in [Hebrews 5:6,10](#); [Hebrews 6:20](#); and most prominently in [Hebrews 7:1-17](#). The New Testament mentions are not an attempt to imply a hereditary line between Melchizedek and Jesus but simply to declare that Jesus is the same type of Priest-King that Melchizedek was and to point out that Melchizedek’s offering of bread and wine was a precursor of Christ’s offering of himself through bread and wine.

As Christians we believe the priesthood of the people has been returned with Jesus as our High Priest (He is priest, prophet, and king), ministerial priests in his service, and the rest of us serving as kingdom priests leading our families in the worship of the one true God. While we certainly see the foundation for our understanding of the priesthood in both the orders of Melchizedek and Levi, our ministerial priests are not ordained into those lines. Rather both our ministerial priests and we as kingdom priests are ordained (ministerial priests through the sacrament of Holy Orders and laity through the sacrament of Baptism) into the priesthood of Christ himself using this Old Testament blueprint as the model – see this [ARTICLE](#) for more on that relationship and model.

I hope that helps.

**Q: Question: Ignatius of Antioch in his writings to various churches quotes scripture, but scripture has not been compiled yet by the time he is writing. How is this possible? Just to be clear I am not talking about the spurious writings (Epistle to the virgin Mary, etc.) but the more accepted writings like his letter to the Ephesians.**

A: First off most, if not all, of the letters that are reliably attributed to Ignatius are thought to have been written in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Traditionally, we date the seven letters he wrote (six to Churches and one to Polycarp) on his way to his martyrdom in Rome to the year AD 107. We can assume that the letter to the Ephesians was written one to several years prior to those letters. Meanwhile, modern scholarship dates the writing of the Pauline letters to the AD 50s, the three synoptic Gospels to the AD 50-60s and John's Gospel from AD 70-90 (less consensus here amongst scholars hence the range). That means the New Testament writings would have been in circulation and use in the Churches for decades prior to Ignatius writing his letters. As Bishop of Antioch and likely a direct disciple of Peter and/or Paul, Ignatius would clearly have been using the New Testament writings himself in the Church of Antioch.

While the Canon of New Testament scripture was not officially declared until the regional councils of Rome and Hippo in the late fourth century, there was widespread agreement on the majority of that Canon in the late second century. One of the criteria used for determining the Canon was the tradition of universal (of near universal) usage of the writings in the churches throughout the known world. That tradition was one that started developing in the first century and Ignatius' references to the New Testament writings demonstrate that.

The bottom line is that your basic premise is in error. The New Testament scripture not only existed but was widely used by the late first century. Therefore, we would be surprised if Ignatius did not reference it.

**Q: At what point would doubt be considered unbelief?**

A: Let's start with some basics. Doubt is a natural part of the human condition. As a result, individuals may question or struggle with matters of faith, doctrine, or the existence of God in the religious sphere. Doubt, when approached with sincerity and a desire for truth, can even lead to a deeper understanding and a stronger faith as many people accept teaching without fully understanding it and hence may not be fully cognizant of its beauty. The [Catechism of the](#)

[Catholic Church](#) acknowledges the role of doubt in the spiritual journey, stating, "Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act. Trusting in God and cleaving to the truths He has revealed is contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason" ([CCC 154](#)).

Unbelief, on the other hand, can be understood as a deliberate rejection or refusal to accept revealed truths or the existence of God. It involves a conscious decision to deny or ignore the evidence and reasons for faith. In the case of divinely revealed truths – Dogma – this would amount to a rejection of God’s truthfulness. The Catechism states, "There are many ways of sinning against faith: voluntary doubt about the faith disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief" ([CCC 2088](#)).

The transition from doubt to unbelief will vary for each individual and can depend on various factors such as personal circumstances, intellectual struggles, and the response to grace. It is important to note that doubt itself is not necessarily sinful, as long as it is accompanied by a sincere search for truth and a willingness to engage with the teachings of the Church. However, if doubt leads to a persistent rejection of revealed truth and a refusal to assent to what God has revealed, it can potentially evolve into unbelief and sin.

Keep in mind that there are different “levels” of Catholic teaching that require different levels of assent. While Dogmatic teaching (truths revealed to us directly by God through Sacred Scripture or Holy Tradition) requires assent of theological faith (we must make act of will to assent regardless of our intellectual belief) these teachings represent a very small amount (although critical) of Catholic doctrine. While doctrine that has been declared infallible (truths not revealed directly by God but declared by the Church) requires firm and definitive assent, we can continue to work to overcome our questions / doubts and we are actually required to do so. Finally mutable doctrine (Church teaching that could change) simply requires our religious submission of will and intellect in recognition that Jesus gave the Church the authority to “bind and loose” (Mathew 16 & 18). In this case, we must decide to accept it despite our questions / doubts while we continue to explore answers and explanations while recognizing that we may someday find our intuition was correct as the doctrine changes.

The bottom line is that it is human nature to question, and you should continue to ask your questions (and receive reasonable responses) until such time as your doubt is removed and the evidence you have gathered allows you to make that final leap of faith. While the small number of Dogmatic teachings require us to use our will to bend our minds to belief, most Catholic teachings do not require this level of assent and we can continue to explore our questions (and are required to do so) while offering our assent in light of the fact that it is a teaching of the Church that God founded.

I hope that helps. Write again any time and if there is a specific teaching you are struggling with, we may be able to help you if you can let us know what that teaching is and what is preventing you from accepting it.

**Q: Is a vasectomy an impediment to getting a marriage convalidated? What is the general process of a convalidation (how much of a lift is it)? I’m trying to prepare for some hard conversations with a**

**friend who is very close to coming back to the church after 20 years. Any other info on this topic that you think is relevant that I haven't thought to ask is appreciated.**

A: Under certain conditions a vasectomy can be considered an impediment to marriage convalidation in the Catholic Church. Convalidation is the process by which a marriage that was initially invalid (such as a civil marriage without proper form) is recognized and made valid by the Church. [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) states that "impaired consent" can be a ground for declaring a marriage invalid ([CCC 1626](#)). This means that if a person enters into marriage with the intention of excluding an essential aspect of marriage, such as the openness to procreation, the marriage may be considered invalid. The Catechism teaches that "By its very nature, the institution of marriage and married love are ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring" ([CCC 1652](#)).

Therefore, if a person has undergone a vasectomy before entering a marriage with the intention of preventing the possibility of procreation, it may be considered an impediment to the convalidation of the marriage. The Church requires that the couple be open to the possibility of children and that they have the intention to fulfill the essential obligations of marriage, including the procreative dimension. If that openness was not there when the marriage was entered into then the marriage cannot be convalidated as it would be treated as a marriage that never was. In that case they would need to pursue a sacramental marriage not a convalidation. However, if the vasectomy came later, and when the marriage was entered into there was an openness to life, the situation is different

That said, if one repents of the sin of self-mutilation (see [CCC 2288-2298](#)) and is open to life (even if highly unlikely as a result of the procedure) now, the process can move forward one way or another. (NOTE: The couple should be made aware that in many cases this procedure can be reversed so they may want to pursue that as well.) It is important to note that each case is evaluated individually by the competent Church authority at the Diocesan level, and there may be specific circumstances or factors that could affect the determination of whether a vasectomy is an impediment to convalidation. It is recommended to consult with a priest or a marriage tribunal for specific guidance in such cases.

If there are any other central church teachings that this couple have struggled with you might want to be prepared to discuss those as well. The good news is there is nothing God cannot forgive other than the refusal to seek his forgiveness. Hence, it is likely that if the couple desires to live according to Christ's teaching as communicated and safeguarded by the Church it is very likely that all perceived obstacles can be overcome.

**Q: If God the father has no physical form how would you rectify when Moses supposedly sees the backside of God in exodus, or when Jacob wrestles God? Would these need to be taken non literally?**

A: There are numerous places in scripture where God is assigned anthropomorphic (having human characteristics) features by the human author. Often we find that in the inspired writers attempts to express/explain God's glory, man's struggle to seek God, or God's power; they use metaphoric language to try to convey the insights into God that they have been given. As this brief [ARTICLE](#) tells us, "Christian tradition has been virtually unanimous in viewing these passages in a metaphorical context.

Any reference to God's body is considered a symbolic means of making God's actions more comprehensible to human beings living in a material world." As John tells us, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." ([John 1:18](#)) Jesus even tells us himself, "Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father." ([John 6:46](#))

The [ARTICLE](#) mentioned does a nice job of explaining the Moses encounter. At the same time the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) references as the Jabor incident in [CCC 2573](#) explaining that when Jacob is wrestling with God he is doing so in prayer. St. Ambrose echoes this interpretation when he describes Jacob's wrestling match with God as follows, "What does fighting with God mean if not engaging in the combat of virtue and aspiring to the highest, making oneself, above all, an imitator of God." In other words, the inspired writer is trying to convey a fundamental truth of who Jacob is and what he is striving to be through his devotion to God and his prayer life.

The bottom line is that the Church has always taught that God is pure spirit and does not have a physical body. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that God is "neither man nor woman: he is God" ([CCC 370](#)). God transcends the limitations of the material world and exists in a spiritual and immaterial form. The Catechism further explains that God is not limited by the constraints of time and space, as human beings are. God is eternal, without beginning or end, and is present everywhere ([CCC 300](#)). Being pure spirit, God does not possess a physical body like human beings do.

However, it is important to note that while God does not have a physical body, the Catholic Church teaches that in the person of Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, the divine nature and a human nature are united. In the Incarnation, the Son of God took on human flesh and dwelt among us ([CCC 456](#)). Jesus Christ, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, has a human body, but this is distinct from the nature of God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Week of 07/10, 07/17, 07/24, & 07/31

**Q: When all forms of divination are condemned, why are they acceptable and in some circumstances praiseworthy (magi reading the stars, Joseph interpreting prophetic dreams, etc.) in the bible?**

A: That is a great question. The [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) defines divinization as, "The seeking after knowledge of future or hidden things by inadequate means.... supplemented by some power which is represented all through history as coming from gods or evil spirits." That same entry in the Catholic Encyclopedia goes on to say that, "Prophecy is the lawful knowledge of the future divination, its superstitious counterpart, is the unlawful." While the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) does teach us that all forms of divinization are to be rejected in [CCC 2116](#), just one paragraph earlier ([CCC 2115](#)) we read that, "God can reveal the future to his prophets or to other saints."

In other words, it is deliberating seeking to gain insights into future events that is the problem. If God chooses to reveal such information to individuals that is His prerogative. We see a long history of God doing just that in scripture as you have pointed out. We also see examples where God did not reveal such knowledge and it was sought after by humans through illicit means. The most famous example of this is King Saul consulting the witch of En-dor in 1 Samuel 28:3-25. In this case Saul sought to use the witch to contact the soul of Samuel so that Samuel could reveal what was to happen to Saul.

The key is to make sure that such knowledge is not actively sought. In addition, if someone believes that God has provided them a private revelation that should be investigated by the Church to determine its validity. There have been many private revelations approved for belief by the faithful over the last 2,000 years. However, there have been far more that the Church has determined are inconsistent with God's public revelation and hence are not from God.

I hope that helps.

**Q: My question is regarding the several reported miracles of the Eucharist. I have seen several articles stating that a couple of the hosts that have been scientifically examined have shown AB type blood. I am wondering if they have done DNA sequencing on these samples. I would presume that an actively bleeding sample such as the host from Mexico would have DNA available but I have not seen any reputable sources online who specify this. I would think that if DNA could not be extracted from a human blood sample that would be a miracle in itself. If they were able to extract DNA then we could compare the different samples and see if they are from the same person. If you could give me some answers or resources for this I would greatly appreciate it.**

A: There is a great book cowritten by Father George Elliot and Dr. Stacey Trasancos entitled, *Behold It Is I*, that examines Eucharistic Miracles from both the faith and science perspectives. The second half of the book, written by Trasancos, provides an objective, science-based view of the tests that were and were not run on several well-known Eucharistic miracles. Stacey addresses the DNA issue and others in her analysis, identifying how well the science does and does not support the evidence for Eucharistic miracles. Stacey provides a critical eye that highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of the scientific data. In addition, in this [PODCAST](#), Stacey is answering science-based questions regarding Eucharistic miracles and the first question addresses the DNA question directly.

Q: Hello! I understand that Gregorian chant ought to be given pride of place in the mass. However, does this mean that praise and worship music can't be used? Could it be just praise and worship in a mass, or does it have to have a mixture of the two? Could drums be used as long as it's reverent, etc? Essentially, what is the churches teaching on this? Are these teachings merely disciplinary, or matters of divine law that cannot be changed? Thank you!

A: Thanks for the question. You are correct in stating that Gregorian Chant should be given pride of place in the Mass. The Fathers of Vatican II made it clear in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy - [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#) . You can find this guidance in SSC 112/114/116. However, neither Sacrossanctum Concilium nor the U.S. Bishops Conference [General Instruction for the Roman Missal \(GIRM\)](#) mandates that ONLY Gregorian Chant be used.

The GIRM states in instruction #41 that:

“The main place should be given, all things being equal, to Gregorian chant, as being proper to the Roman Liturgy. Other kinds of sacred music, in particular polyphony, are in no way excluded, provided that they correspond to the spirit of the liturgical action and that they foster the participation of all the faithful.

Since the faithful from different countries come together ever more frequently, it is desirable that they know how to sing together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, especially the Profession of Faith and the Lord’s Prayer, according to the simpler settings.”

The GIRM goes on to say in instruction #393 that:

“Bearing in mind the important place that singing has in a celebration as a necessary or integral part of the Liturgy, all musical settings for the texts of the Ordinary of Mass, for the people’s responses and acclamations, and for the special rites that occur in the course of the liturgical year must be submitted to the Secretariat of Divine Worship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for review and approval prior to publication.”

The short answer to your question is that “Praise and Worship” music can be used if the specific song and musical arrangement has been approved. At the same time, there is no instrument that is specifically excluded for use, so drum use would not be a problem. All of this is a matter of practice and not divine law so it can be changed.

Unfortunately, most parishes do not have the musical expertise required to leverage Gregorian Chant during Mass. This is a skill that, while coming back into practice, is simply not held by most parish Music Ministry teams. As a result, “all things are not equal” and parishes must rely on other types of approved musical accompaniment that their Music Ministry teams can provide. This is why you often do hear “Praise and Worship” music while participating in a Catholic Mass.

All that said, there are a growing number of parishes and Churches staffed by religious orders that do leverage Gregorian Chant. When done well, it is truly a beautiful experience (subjective opinion only). If you can participate in such a Mass, I will highly recommend it.

**Q: Hello! I am a catholic, however, If we would call the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination abominable because God predestined some to hell and some to heaven regardless of their choice, how is it much different than the catholic belief that God would have been totally just in leaving us in our sin, therefore, hell, even before we could choose? If he decides to save a few, wouldn't that square with the idea that God will have mercy on who he has mercy? Because he's not obliged to save all, wouldn't it be just for him to save a few and damn a few regardless of their choice?**

A: Thanks for the question. It is an interesting and nuanced one. Let’s start with the basics on this one. God created in his image and likeness purely out of love. We did nothing to earn our own existence and hence how much and what type of it we get is completely a freely given gift



of God. For us to say God should have given us more would be like telling someone that just gave you a \$1,000,000 gift that it was not good enough. It is a gift; it is up to the giver to decide how much is given and who gets what.

There is a huge difference between God creating some people to be damned and choosing not to act after we took our gift and threw it away. In the first case God would be positively acting to implement evil – His act of creating someone to be damned would be an evil act and not something the God we worship would engage in. In the second case, God would simply be choosing not to give us more gifts than we already received – exercising His right as the gift giver. God gave us the \$1,000,000 when He created us, we wasted it, and we have no right to expect that He would give us anymore.

The good news is that God loves us unconditionally and not only gave us more but made the more He gave us even greater than the initial gift. Our life in Eden would have been idyllic but would have left us in a childlike state dependent upon God for everything, never experiencing adversity that would allow us to grow. When we fell, God promised a savior who would come to save us from sin and death and allow us to live within the Trinitarian love, not as dependent children, but as adopted sons and daughters. We didn't deserve the initial \$1,000,000 and we certainly didn't deserve an even greater gift as we were owed absolutely nothing at all, including our existence.

Hopefully that helps you see the difference, and also helps you recognize just how much God loves us – His creations. Write again any time.

**Q: How can the teachings of the Catholic Church be the fullness of truth when the Church is made up of corruptible people? If the stain of humanity touches everything in this world because of original sin, then why is the church which is made up of people, exempt from this? I just feel apprehensive about giving up all of my freedom to a bunch of corruptible people like me, especially seeing all the questionable things the Church has done.**

A: Let's start with what is meant when we say the "Catholic Church possesses the fullness of the truth." What we mean by that is that the Catholic Church possesses the fullness of God's revelation (including the Liturgy and sacraments), that the Holy Spirit that guides us to that truth, and the holy Spirit ensures that the flawed men that are working within the institutional Church do not corrupt that truth in any way. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "The Holy Spirit, who thus keeps the memory of Christ alive in his Church at prayer, also leads her toward the fullness of truth and inspires new formulations expressing the unfathomable mystery of Christ at work in his Church's life, sacraments, and mission." ([CCC 2625](#))

The truth that the Church possesses is not the truth of the flawed men and women that are part of this institution. Rather, it is Christ's truth. At the same time, the Church is not dependent upon flawed men and women to safeguard and interpret that truth. Jesus promised to send the spirit to us to do just that when he said, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have

said to you.” ([John 14:26](#)) Later Jesus tells us, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” ([John 16:13-14](#)) Finally, Jesus promised that, “...the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church.” ([Matthew 16:18](#))

You are not giving up your freedom when you choose to follow Christ. True freedom is the ability to become the best version of yourself. Unfortunately, since the “Enlightenment”, western culture has embraced a new and childish definition of freedom – the ability to do whatever you want, whenever you want, without restriction. In choosing to follow Christ (you are not choosing to follow the flawed men in Christ’s Church) you are choosing to adhere your will to the one person that loves you unconditionally, knows exactly what is necessary for you to become the best version of yourself, and wants nothing but your good. God has worked through flawed men throughout revelation history so it should be no surprise that His Church includes them. Christ himself selected a traitor (Judas), a denier (Peter – who He made Pope), and a doubter (Thomas) through which to work. We continue to have traitors, deniers, and doubters in His Church today. The Holy Spirit is ensuring that no matter what the flaws are of the men working within the institution Christ’s truth will be preserved. Doubting or leaving the Church because of the evils committed by some of its leaders would be akin to the other Apostles leaving Jesus because of Judas, Peter, and Thomas.

**Q: If Christians have God's grace, then what is happening with that grace when a good Christian sins? Is it inactive? Or rejected? I guess my question is, what should a good catholic do immediately after they have sinned? Does the Church have an opinion on this?**

Let’s start by defining what grace is. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) defines it as follows:

“The free and undeserved gift that God gives us to respond to our vocation to become His adopted children. As sanctifying grace, God shares His divine life and friendship with us in a habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that enables the soul to live with God, to act by His love. As actual grace, God gives us the help to conform our lives to His will. Sacramental grace and special graces (charisms, the grace of one’s state of life) are gifts of the Holy Spirit and help us live our Christian vocation.” (see [CCC 1996-2005](#))

A key element of this definition is that “God’s free initiative demands man’s free response.” ([CCC 2002](#)) This means we can choose to accept or reject God’s grace and can make that choice at any time including after first accepting it.

As Catholics we believe that our salvation is not a one-time event. Rather, it is a process whereby we gain sanctifying grace through the sacrament of Baptism, can lose that grace by choosing ourselves over God when committing grave (mortal) sins with full knowledge and our deliberate consent, and can reconcile ourselves with God and return to a state of sanctifying grace through the sacrament of penance. God also provides us the sacrament that comes from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the source and summit of our faith, the Eucharist. The Eucharist cleanses / heals us of / from venial sins, strengthen us against sin, transforms us to be more Christlike, and unify us to Christ and each other as members of His body.

All that said the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that, “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.” ([CCC 1131](#)) So while the sacraments are the ordinary means by which we access God’s grace, we must be properly disposed to receive that grace. This relates directly to your question about what to do when one has sinned...the simple answer is repent. If you are struggling to repent (perhaps you are not truly sorry for your sin) pray to God for the gift of repentance. Repentance (metanoia) means to change the way you think. When you repent you are reconfiguring your thoughts and desires to align them with the will of God as opposed to your own passions or concupiscent nature.

The bottom line is the acceptance and application of God’s grace is a choice we must make every day. If we fail in that choice and reject that grace, we must return to God and work to align our will more closely to His. God gives us the great sacrament of penance so we can return to sanctifying grace and the even greater sacrament of the Eucharist to help strengthen our ability to be masters of self and transform us into a more Christlike version of ourselves. When we fall through sin, we work to repent, take advantage of the sacrament of Penance, and then seek the next opportunity to receive the Eucharist so we can be transformed.

**Q: What is the Church's position on The Warning/The Three Days of Darkness/The Illumination of Conscience? I have heard these terms and been aware of them for at least a few years, even recently reading The Warning by Christine Watkins, but I am not sure what to make of this. Is there much, if anything, scriptural about any of this, or is it mostly based on private revelations? If scriptural then I know it is to be believed, but if based on private revelation I know that we are not obligated to believe, although it could be worthy of belief, like certain apparitions. Personally, I believe an Illumination of Conscience may be the only thing that can bring us out of the current depraved state of mankind, although I don't think everyone would repent after being shown their sins, which is my understanding of what the Illumination will entail. Any insight you can provide would be helpful, and any books on the subject matter.**

To start off you should be aware that the Church rarely, if ever holds a position on any form of private revelation other than to declare it is worthy or unworthy of belief. That said, no Catholic is required to believe even those private revelations that are approved as worthy. In this case the Church at large has not issued any definitive statements regarding the private revelations associated with, “The Warning/The Three Days of Darkness/The Illumination of Conscience.” However, local Bishops have questioned and even condemned some of the main seers which should alert you to the fact that something is amiss. At this point the Church as a body has not deemed it necessary to significantly investigate these claims, which should serve as another warning.

Every critical analysis I have seen of these beliefs leads me to steer clear. Jimmy Akin of Catholic Answers has addressed this for Catholic Answers several times and produced a couple of

episodes related to it on his Mysterious World podcast. This [ARTICLE](#) by Jimmy is a great starting point. Episodes [168](#) and [169](#) of Jimmy's podcast are well done and expose these "private revelations" for what they really are – not worthy of belief and based upon the testimony of unreliable seers. I know you had hopes that the illumination of conscience would be helpful for today's woes, but I believe you will be better off placing your hope in God's providence instead.

**Q: Can you define what the sin of gluttony really is? Eating too much at a meal? I need to get a better understanding of it. Thank you!**

**A:** The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) defines gluttony as "the overindulgence in food or drink" (Glossary of CCC). It is a sin that goes beyond the natural and necessary act of nourishing oneself. The sin of gluttony is the excessive or disordered indulgence in food, drink, or other physical pleasures. It is considered one of the seven deadly sins, which are vices that can lead to further moral and spiritual harm if not addressed (see [CCC 1866](#)).

Gluttony can manifest in different ways. It may involve overeating, consuming food or drink to the point of excess, indulging in luxurious or extravagant meals, or obsessing over food and constantly seeking pleasure from it. Gluttony can also extend to other areas of sensual pleasure, such as excessive indulgence in sexual pleasure or the misuse of other physical delights. The key is that a single instance of overeating could be considered gluttonous, but it does not rise to the sin of gluttony until it becomes excessive and obsessive – almost to the point of having an addictive quality.

The sin of gluttony is considered harmful for several reasons. It can lead to physical health problems, such as obesity and related illnesses. It can also lead to a lack of self-control and discipline, which can affect other areas of a person's life. Additionally, gluttony can hinder spiritual growth by fostering a preoccupation with worldly pleasures and neglecting the pursuit of virtue and holiness.

To overcome the sin of gluttony, individuals are called to practice temperance, which is the virtue that moderates the desire for pleasure and helps maintain balance in the use of created goods. This involves cultivating self-control, gratitude for the gift of food, and using it in a manner that respects the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. This [ARTICLE](#) in the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) will provide greater detail that you might find helpful.

**Q: Would we be breaking the Sunday sabbath if we make our kids take swimming lessons on Sundays? They do not enjoy them and we have not found another day that works. Thank you! Andy**

**A:** The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) contains a fair amount relative to the Sabbath and our Sunday obligation which can be found in [CCC 2168-2195](#). Regarding the Christian Sabbath (Sunday) the Catechism informs us that:

*"On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body. Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest. The faithful should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life, and health."* (CCC 2185)

The Church's focus is primarily on the Sunday obligation, which calls Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. This is a duty and a precept of the Church as found in [CCC 2041-2043](#) along with the other four precepts of the Church.

As long as the swimming lessons do not prevent your family from fulfilling its Sunday obligation (which can also be met through participating in a Saturday Vigil Mass) I do not see the swimming lessons as a problem as you can legitimately identify that as a family need to safeguard the lives of your children. We see in [CCC 582](#), "...that the sabbath rest is not violated by serving God and neighbor, which his (Jesus') own healings did." Once again, you are fulfilling your committed service to God as you shepherd your children in life.

**Q: Where does the term Lord of hosts or God of hosts come from? What is meant by the word "hosts"?**

It is one I never really thought about in detail. I always assumed that it means the Lord of All (using the definition for "hosts" that means a large number of things or people). However, I wanted to go back and see where it appears in Sacred Scripture to verify my assumption and determine if the term had more meaning.

The term "Lord of hosts" or "God of hosts" is found hundreds of times in various books of the Old Testament (e.g., [1 Samuel 1:3](#)), particularly in the prophetic writings. The Hebrew people would not use the name of God or even the word God in writing as a sign of respect for the name. As a result, they used other terms such as "Lord of Hosts." As I assumed, it is a title used to refer to God, emphasizing His sovereignty, power, and authority over all creation, including the angelic hosts or armies. The phrase "Lord of hosts" appears frequently in the Book of Isaiah, such as in [Isaiah 6:3](#), where the seraphim proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" It is also found in other prophetic books like Jeremiah (e.g., [Jeremiah 6:6](#)), Zechariah (e.g., [Zechariah 1:3](#)), and Malachi (e.g., [Malachi 1:4](#)).

In summary, the term "Lord of hosts" or "God of hosts" is a biblical title used to express God's supreme authority and power over all creation, including the angelic hosts or armies. It is found in various prophetic writings of the Old Testament, emphasizing God's sovereignty and leadership.

**Q: Looking for book recommendation. I thought I may have run across this in the past, but have forgotten the title. I'd like to learn more about the first century culture and believes that Jesus was tapping into, or challenging. Ex. the lost sheep parable. I heard that the Jews would have thought that an outrageous act to leave the 99 for the one. We understand it in the context of the fulfillment, but the Jews did not. Hope I am making a little sense :) thank you!**

A: First off, I would recommend a good Catholic Commentary on Scripture like the *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* – a multi volume set published by Baker Academic – if you are looking for an authentic Catholic interpretation of scripture with insights into the context of the age in which it was written you can't go wrong there. Also, if you really want to dig into context there is a book entitled, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* – a single volume (there is an Old Testament version as well) published by IVP Academic – that really digs into the cultural background and explains how hearers of the Word would have heard it in their age.

Finally, if you would simply like more insights into the parables you can't go wrong with Father Sebastian Walshe's book, *Secrets From Heaven*, which is published by Catholic Answers Press.

Finally, you are correct 1<sup>st</sup> Century hearers would have thought that Jesus was talking about a crazy shepherd who would abandon the 99 to seek the 1. The point of the parable is to describe the unbound and unconditional love of God. God loves us so much that He will even risk those that have been saved (the 99) if He could save those that are lost to Him (the 1). The idea of most parables is to tell a story using familiar items/contexts (in this case agrarian references) but to do so in an unusual way to prompt the hearer to not just listen to the story but replay it in their mind to determine its meaning. Jesus is a master of that which is why I so often recommend Father Walsh's book.

**Q: Did people in the Old Testament pre-flood times really live for hundreds of years and even 969 years old like Methuselah? \*I realize it's not an important matter of faith\* Is there scientific evidence to prove they did? Also, it is clear that modern science tells us that prehistoric people lived short lives, based on the data which has been collected from ancient peoples. So, how do we reconcile the two? thanks as always.**

The first thing that you need to understand is that the first 11 chapters of Genesis (creation through the tower of Babel) are not written as a science or history text. It is mankind's prehistory written in symbolic language (see the [Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC 337, 362, 375](#)). It expresses fundamental truths about creation (e.g., God created everything out of nothing and man in His image and likeness), the fall (e.g., man lost trust in God, and we separated ourselves from Him by choosing ourselves over Him) and God's plan for our salvation.

“The first eleven chapters deal with the history of the world and of man, the history of civilization and culture, tracing the early outlines of God's plan of salvation and the role Israel is to play in it. These early chapters, written in popular language, rich in imagery, provide answers to the kind of questions every human being, in any age, is inclined to ask: Who made me? Where does the world come from? What is life all about? What is the meaning of suffering, sickness, and death? What explanation is there for war and human strife? Man wants answers to these questions. He wants to know how he can re-establish peace, how and by whom he can be restored to spiritual health. He realizes his limitations and those of others, and yet in the depths of his soul he feels an infinite capacity for peace and happiness which no one and nothing on earth can satisfy.”  
(<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/genesis> )

In ancient cultures it was ordinary to ascribe extreme old age to those that held important roles or who were widely respected in a community. It was a means of recognizing their importance to the community. This [ARTICLE](#) explains some of this. While it is always possible that God could have given the patriarchs the preternatural gift of extreme old age (which is why Catholics are permitted to take that element of Genesis literally) it is more likely that what you are reading is the product of ancient writing styles and cultural practices.

**Q: Why do Catholics have more books in the Bible than protestants? Why do some people claim that the history in those books do not add up to other history we have found? Is the Book of Judith a true**

**story or more like a parable, and does all the things it claims to be true actually line up with history or is it incorrect?**

A: There are actually two different questions here. I would like to start with the second one first – “Why do some people claim that the history in those books do not add up to other history we have found?” You should be aware that while Sacred Scripture is the inerrant Word of God presenting fundamental truths about Him and our relation to Him, it is NOT impeccable. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that this, “... truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.” ([CCC 110](#)) What this means is that the books of the Bible are written in a variety of genres and even individual books may employ several genres across its contents. You must be aware of what that genre is when reading the text.

The book of Judith is not written as a strict historical text. It is a story about how God remains the master of history and will act to save His chosen people when necessary and is a pious reflection on the meaning of the annual Passover observance. The name “Judith” actually means “Jewess,” indicating that the protagonist is intended to represent string Jewish women in general. The author provides the reader a signal that it is not a historical text in the very first verse when he identifies Nebuchadnezzar as the King of Assyria when all his readers would have known that Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the Babylonians. Ancient writers would often use a device like this to alert their readers to the genre of the text. This [ARTICLE](#) provides a great deal more about this technic and some of the potential intricacies of Judith.

Now let’s move onto, “Why do Catholics have more books in the Bible than protestants?” The difference is in the number of books of the Old Testament recognized by Protestants. The Jewish Old Testament Canon was not fixed in the first century. There were a variety of Jewish sects in the first century – Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, etc... and each of them recognized a different set of writings as inspired scripture. The Church recognizes 46 while many (not all) protestants recognize only 39. The difference is what is known as the Deuterocanon (the second canon) – Tobias, Judith, Baruch, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, First and Second Maccabees (also certain additions to Esther and Daniel). The Church recognizes the 46 books of the Old Testament that we now have because Jesus and the Apostles almost always referenced a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures called the Septuagint when quoting scripture and that translation contained those books.

By the end of the second century Christians accepted the 73 books of the Catholic Canon although there were some exceptions. However, by the end of the fourth century these discrepancies were almost entirely nonexistent because of Church councils in Rome (AD 382), Hippo (AD 393), and Carthage (AD 397) that validated the 73 books of the current canon of scripture. This was reaffirmed at the council of Florence (AD 1441) when the Eastern and Western Churches reunified (albeit briefly). Ultimately, the Deuterocanon were included in the list of 73 books of that Bible that were infallibly declared as Sacred Scripture at the council of Trent in 1563.

There was never any real question of the Deuterocanon being part of the Bible within the Christian world for the first 1500 years of Christianity. It was only with the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation that their inspired nature was called into question by the reformers.

This is what ultimately led to the infallible definition declared at Trent – to make it absolutely clear what the Church had always understood to be part of the Old Testament Canon.

It is unfortunate that the Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli) decided to remove these books from the Protestant canon as they are indeed the inspired Word of God, and they bring much to the table with regards to enlightening Christians. It was this removal that finally prompted the Church to infallibly declare the canon of scripture at Trent to make it absolutely clear what was considered scripture for the first 1,500 years of Christianity.

## Week of 06/26 & 07/03

### **Q: Why is a bell rung three times during the Mystery of Faith portion of the mass?**

A: That is an important question as many are confused by the fact that bell usage is not consistent from parish to parish or Mass to Mass. The Church has a long history of using bells to call people to Mass, sanctify certain times of the day—for instance, it once was the custom, in Catholic countries, to ring church bells at noon so workers in the fields could pause and recite the Angelus – or alert the assembly to the arrival of critical points in the Mass. Although not a required practice (this is why some parishes use bells and others do not), altar servers will ring the bells during the critical moments of the Eucharistic Prayer. This was often deemed necessary in the extraordinary form of the Mass (A.K.A. Traditional Latin Mass, Mass of 1962, Tridentine Mass) as many in the assembly could find themselves unsure of what specific part of the Mass was being prayed since the Mass was prayed in Latin, the assembly had little direct participation in the prayers, and the celebrant often prayed the Eucharistic prayer in an inaudible voice.

The first ringing may take place prior to the consecration, as a sign that this important moment in the Mass is about to take place. Typically, this pre-consecratory bell is rung once as the Holy Spirit is called upon to sanctify the bread and wine. This is the moment that the celebrant brings his hands together and down over the bread and wine. This occurs just before he begins the Institution narrative, in which Jesus' words at the Last Supper are recounted. Following this, there are usually two more times when the altar bell is rung: 1) after the consecration of the bread and 2) after the consecration of the wine. The bells after each consecration may be rung once or three times to draw attention to the precise moment when transubstantiation – the conversion of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ – takes place. The practice of ringing the bells three times is intended to echo the trio of hosannas that come from the heavenly choirs (see Revelation 19:1-8) that are celebrating the Mass with us. The three rings are also a reminder of the Triune nature of our God that has just been made really present for us on the Altar.

**Q: How are we to respond to cults of personality in Catholic culture? I know certain men in the Church like Bishop Strickland are defending the faith, but he and other prominent conservative figures are also receiving reprimands from the Vatican. The Strickland situation, I believe, has more to do with**



**finances than his preaching, but I know many Catholics are lashing-out at the Vatican and Pope Francis in this situation. It just seems like Catholics in America are more willing to follow cults of personality who espouse Catholic teaching - or at least certain aspects of it - but may not be upholding the papacy or validity of the Church because we are so desperate for the America of the past and see the hierarchy as corrupt and liberal. Any advice would be welcome.**

A: Thanks for the question. It is an important one. Unfortunately, humanity is broken. One of the results of that brokenness is that we are easily swayed by the “shiny object” and can often lose site of the “big picture” because of it. When we find a strong voice that consistently seems to speak the truth, we tend to put all of our faith in the voice. It’s easier for us to listen to someone we trust (that’s faith) than to search for the truth ourselves. If you study history, you will find that this has been a problem since day one within the Church. You will also find that humans have always pined for the perceived perfections of the past. We tend to remember the glory of the “good ole days” and forget all of the blemishes of the past.

It’s easier than ever to get caught up in this today because of the proliferation of electronic communication. We have access to information (often curated and incomplete) instantly. We now have a crowded field of voices seeking to lead us to follow their sense of the truth. Some of those voices are quite sound. Others can be quite destructive.

Whenever friends or family members get caught up in this or seek to catch me up in media driven hysteria, I remind them of some basic principles:

1. Jesus is God. Everything Jesus says is true and for our good. ([John 1:1-14](#))
2. Jesus established a Church so that man could participate in the completion of His mission to bring the Kingdom of God to its fulfillment on earth. ([Matthew 16:18](#); [Matthew 18:15-17](#); [Luke 10:16](#))
3. Jesus established a hierarchy to guide that Church – The Pope (Peter and his successors) and Bishops (the Apostles and their successors) that has the power to interpret and enforce laws. ([Matthew 16:19](#); [Matthew 18:18-19](#))
4. Jesus guaranteed that His Church would win against the forces of evil. We know how the story ends and have nothing to fear. ([Matthew 16:18](#))
5. Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church to truth to prevent human brokenness from leading it astray. ([John 16:13-15](#); [John 14:16](#))

The bottom line is that I choose to trust in Jesus (not the persuasive men of any age) and the plan He put forward for His Church. I insist on respect for that plan and the men (as broken as they may be) who He has asked to carry it out over the centuries – especially the popes (both those we perceive as great and those we perceive as flawed). Two thousand years of Church history has demonstrated that this trust is well placed as people have been predicting the Church’s downfall since day one. Despite all we humans do to try to undermine the Church, it continues to function and work towards the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom on earth.

I hope that helps. Write again any time.

**Q: What exactly do people mean by natural law? I look up online from many Christian sources, but I find they tend to go too deep into academic language. Would you mind explaining it to me in layman's terms? Is it our conscience? The design of the world? I'm not sure.**

A: This is a subject that can be made more complex by the use of terms and some will tend to make it even more complex sounding through their writing. Let me try to give you the short and sweet version starting with some definitions and summing up with a couple of sentences.

The Moral Law defines the path we must walk to reach beatitude (Happiness or blessedness, especially the eternal happiness of heaven, which is described as the vision of God). There are different and interrelated expressions of the Moral Law – the Eternal Law, Natural Law, & Revealed Law are the three we will focus on.

**Eternal Law:** The plan of God for the universe that directs its operation for the good.

**Natural Law:** Man's rational participation in the eternal law - It is the light of understanding placed in all men by God enabling man to discern by reason the good and the evil; the truth and the lie. Unfortunately, our damaged nature prevents us from perceiving and acting on Natural Law clearly – we need grace to guide and strengthen us.

**Revealed Law:** God gave the Old Law (The Decalogue – The Ten Commandments) to help man choose the good and to prepare the Way for Christ. However, the Old Law is incomplete – it speaks to what is required but does not provide the strength man needs to consistently abide by it. The New Law of the Gospel is the perfection of the Old Law – it is the work of Christ expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5-7](#)). The entirety of the New Law can be summed up in the commandment of Jesus to, "love one another as I have loved you." ([John 15:12](#)). It is enabled within us through the grace of the Holy Spirit acting particularly through the Sacraments.

So... God created everything with a design for the good of all creation (Eternal Law) – a design that will allow all creatures within the universe to achieve the ultimate state of happiness. God implants that design (Natural Law) in man, so that through the use of our reason and free will, we can choose to live according to that design. Unfortunately, the refusal of our first parents to adhere to God's design introduced a brokenness that makes it difficult for us to follow the Natural Law embedded within us (our reason is no longer the master of our passions). Through revelation God introduced guidelines like the commandments to give us a version of the natural law outside of ourselves (Revealed Law) so that we could more easily sense (see, touch, hear) and follow it. However, it was not until Jesus came to complete that revelation that we were also given the access to the grace we need (through the Liturgy and Sacraments) to overcome our brokenness and follow that law consistently.

All of this is presented very well in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 1950-1986](#) which you could read in just a few minutes.

**Q: How do you make sense of the verse in John where Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." I have very little problem**

**believing that baptism is the regeneration of the soul and that it is the beginning of a relationship with God. But I have a problem with the "...and the Spirit" part of that verse. Some of my Protestant friends claim that there are several forms of baptism: water baptism, the Spirit's baptism, and being baptized into the Body of Christ. They also claim that "water baptism does not save us, but it is to be an act of obedience. It symbolizes that we died with Christ, were buried with Him, and raised up with Him to a new life." How would you respond to this claim as a Catholic? Does the spirit come after the Baptism? Or does it maybe take place in another sacrament? Thank you so much.**

A: Thanks for the question. It is a great one. Let's start with the claim that "water baptism does not save us, but it is to be an act of obedience." If they believe in the inspired nature of Sacred Scripture, they might have a hard time explaining 1 Peter 3:21 which states, "**Baptism**, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." If they would like a few more verses of interest, they can take a look at [Acts 2:37-38](#), [Acts 22:16](#), [Romans 6:4-5](#), and [1 Corinthians 6:11](#). If they can examine these verses as a whole and still think of Baptism as being a purely symbolic gesture, I would challenge their intellectual honesty.

Now let's move on to [John 3:5](#) (the verse you quote above). When Jesus references being born of water and spirit you need to consider who Jesus is speaking with – Nicodemus, a Jewish scholar. Jesus is a master at speaking to his audience using references they would have understood (e.g., when Jesus defends the resurrection using the Pentateuch – the only books of the Bible the Sadducees accepted as Sacred Scripture – [Mark 12:18-27](#)). Nicodemus would have immediately recognized that Jesus was referencing God's promise made through the Prophet Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 36:25-27](#)). In Ezekiel, God is making a promise to form an obedient people by putting his Spirit in them. John develops this connection between water and the Holy Spirit throughout the Gospel (e.g., [John 7:37-39](#)).

As Catholics we believe that not only that we are initially saved through the grace of God through Baptism, but that we are infused with the Holy Spirit. You can read about this infusion of the Spirit in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 1215](#), and [1226-1229](#). This belief has been a constant belief since Christ established the Catholic Church two thousand year ago. As a matter of fact, the Catechism quotes a number of the Church fathers in the beautiful section on Baptism ([CCC 1213-1284](#)). For example, Justin Martyr is quoted in CCC 1216, Gregory of Nazianzus in CCC 1216, Ambrose in CCC 1225, and Augustine in CCC 1228. Even St. Paul was quite clear on this in [Titus 3:5](#).

Protestants often tend to forget that there were fifteen hundred years of Church history, study, and critical thinking before the first Protestant denomination emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and began proclaiming heterodox opinions. I would suggest you challenge your friends to read the Catechism section on Baptism ([CCC 1213-1284](#)). It would take them no more than fifteen minutes to read end to end. I would further suggest that they take the time to examine the footnotes in that section as they will find a bounty of references to Sacred Scripture, the writings of the early Church fathers and ecumenical councils. I find that when Protestants take the time to examine the fullness of the Catholic Church's teaching (and recognize it's source) they often find it difficult to maintain their position.

**Q: When it comes to Mortal sin, how can I tell when something is a Grave Matter (apart from the list of already defined grave sins), and how do I determine whether or not full consent and full knowledge have taken place? It can feel quite hard to pinpoint just what sins are mortal and which ones are not.**

A: Thanks for the questions. They are important ones that many (if not most) ask themselves from time to time. You clearly understand the three conditions for a sin to be considered mortal – grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent. It would be great if there was a definitive list of grave sins, but there is not. Joe Heschmeyer provides several sources for identifying grave sins in this [ARTICLE](#), while also highlighting the reality that context can impact the gravity of a sin (e.g., stealing food from a starving man would be more grave than stealing \$10 from a millionaire). Personally, I find that the section on the Ten Commandments in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) provides a great deal of insight with regards to potential mortal sins associated with each commandment. I think most readers are quite surprised by the sheer number and diversity of actions associated with each commandment that would be considered grave matter. I would suggest you peruse [CCC 2083-2557](#) as it may help clarify things for you.

Assuming we do recognize an action as grave, when we start to question whether we have full knowledge or deliberate consent it can lead us down a slippery slope. As humans we are pretty good at justifying our actions – often we can fool ourselves more easily than others can fool us. I think this brief [ARTICLE](#) says it best. More often than not, we do indeed have the required knowledge and are in a position to offer our free consent to the actions we choose. As a result, it is always best to err on the conservative side and confess our sins related to grave matter even if there is chance that it might not rise to the level of mortal sin.

The good news is that we can take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as often as we need to. The better news is that we are not only absolved of all sins for which we are contrite, but we are strengthened against sin both individually and collectively (as members of the body of Christ) when we receive this great Sacrament. ([See CCC 1468-1470, and 1496](#))

A good rule of thumb is, “When in doubt, let it out” – confess it. This way you are not worrying one way or the other and can put your focus on growing closer to God and leverage the grace He freely offers us to resist all sin.

Weeks of 06/12 & 06/19

**Q: Is Mary Magdalena one of the apostles?**

A: That is an interesting question as you often hear Mary Magdalene referred to (outside of scripture) as, “The Apostle to the Apostles.” At the same time, Mary Magdalene was clearly an early disciple / follower of Christ. However, scripture informs us that Jesus called 12 Apostles (see below) who, after three years of preparation, were given the responsibility for creating and spreading Christ’s Church on earth. The first Bishops were the successors to the Apostles and

that succession has carried forth to this day with each of today's current Bishop being able to trace their lineage back to one of the Apostles.

Mary Magdalene is often called, "The Apostle to the Apostles" because following the resurrection Jesus explicitly told her to, "...go to my brothers (the Apostles) and tell them." (John 20:11-18) So, in one sense she was an "Apostle" as she shared the "Good News" of the resurrection with the Apostles. However, she was never called to be an Apostle and given the mandates that the Apostles were given to "Bind and Loose" (Matthew 18:18), Forgive Sins (John 20:19-23), "Do this in memory of me" (Celebrate Mass – Luke 22:14-20), and "Go make Disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The bottom line is that Mary Magdalene was an early Disciple and an important figure in Christ's ministry and He did give her the responsibility of informing His Apostles that he has risen from the dead, but she was not herself one of His 12 Apostles.

### The Call of the Apostles

In the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) we are presented with similar stories related to the call of the apostles and similarly ordered lists of all twelve. In all three synoptics Simon, James and John are called first with both Matthew (Matthew 4:18-22) and Mark (Mark 1:16-20) listing Simon, Andrew, James, and John as the first. Luke doesn't specifically name Andrew (Luke 5:1-11), but it could be reasonably speculated that he was called along with Peter his brother.

All three synoptics then go on to relate the call of Matthew (AKA Levi) as seen in Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:13-14, and Luke 5:27-28. However, we do not get a complete timeline of the call of the remaining seven in any of the synoptics. After naming the first five all three synoptics simply go on to list the remaining seven of the original twelve – Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas (AKA Didymus), James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus (AKA Judas, not the Iscariot), Simon the Cananean (called a Zealot), and Judas the Iscariot as seen in Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:13-19, and Luke 6:12-16.

The situation is further complicated by the Gospel of John which presents a slightly different picture as Andrew become Jesus' first follower along with another disciple (speculated to be John himself) in John 1:35-39. From there we hear about the call of Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel (thought to be AKA Bartholomew) to round out the first five (John 1:40-51). John then mentions that there were twelve in John 6:67 and later calls out Judas Iscariot (John 6:71), Thomas (John 11:16) and the other Judas (not the Iscariot, AKA Thaddeus – John 14:22). However, the remaining four go unnamed in John's Gospel. This should not be that surprising as John's Gospel was written last and hence most of his

readers well aware of who the twelve were as the three synoptic Gospels were in circulation for several decades prior to John's publication.

**Q: Hello one of the things my daughter struggles with is the Bible being inspired by the Holy Spirit. We were having a conversation the other day talking about different things that she believes Catholics are too critical on such as gay marriage, homosexuality. The fact that she doesn't believe the Bible is the word of God is a core problem. How do I lovingly explain to her the truth of the Bible as the word of God?**

A: Thanks for the question. It's a good one. I would start by clarifying what the Church teaches about the inspired nature of Sacred Scripture as found in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). You can find this in [CCC 101-108](#) along with the Holy Spirit's role in the inspiration of Scripture in [CCC 109-119](#). I would encourage you to review this with your daughter as a starting point.

Once we are all on the same page regarding Church teaching on the nature of Sacred Scripture you can move on to asking your daughter a couple of questions starting with, "Do you believe that Jesus is God?" If she answers, "No," to that question you need to address that before you can address the inspired and inerrant nature of Sacred Scripture. If she answers, "Yes," you can move forward with the case for the inerrant nature of scripture.

While Scripture itself speaks to its inspirational nature (e.g., [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)), using the Bible to prove the nature of the Bible is a circular argument that few would accept. What I prefer to do if the individual recognizes Jesus is God is look to what Jesus said to His apostles. By giving Peter the keys to the kingdom and the power to bind and loose ([Matthew 16:16-19](#)) Peter and his successors were set-up as Christ's Prime Minister working with the Apostles (also given the power to bind and loose in [Matthew 18:15-18](#)) and their successors (the Bishops down through history) to safeguard, interpret, and transmit divine revelation in both its written form (Sacred Scripture) and oral form (Holy Tradition).

In other words, Jesus empowered the Apostles to correctly convey what has been divinely revealed promising that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church. If you believe Jesus is God, then you must trust He knows what He is doing and would not allow His Church to mislead the members of Christ's body. This is why we believe that writers of Sacred Scripture were, "...writing whatever he wanted written and no more," ([CCC 106](#)) and "...we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to Sacred Scriptures." ([CCC 107](#))

The bottom line is that one either accepts that God has been gradually revealing Himself and letting us know who we were destined to be (His beloved Sons and Daughters) or you doubt God has been interacting in our world (first through the prophets and later by incarnating as Jesus). If you believe, then you would naturally believe that the vehicles God chose to use are inerrant as He could allow nothing less. If you don't believe we need to once again back up to that question. What you can't do is believe yet also assume that God would not do what was necessary to ensure his revelation would be maintained and transmitted accurately as that would make God less than God.

I hope that helps as a starting point.

**Q: I heard someone argue that Leviticus's prohibition on same sex intercourse was only male on male because the culture at the time forbade men from being passive as they were at the top of the social hierarchy. Therefore, this passage shouldn't be used to justify prohibition of the same sex relationships currently occurring today.**

A: This is a pretty simple one to address as it has been addressed by many before me. I would recommend you check out Trent Horn's [ARTICLE](#) which covers the entire issue well, including the common arguments against the biblical texts condemning homosexual behavior – both male and female. The second half of the article really drills into your specific question and objection.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: In all the versions of Italian Bibles that I checked, Matthew 26 and Mark 14 have Jesus say when consecrating the wine .... shed for you and for MANY (per molti). When I was in Italy, at the masses I attended they used the words "per tutti" (for ALL). Given that each sacrament must have the proper matter and form (e.g., you cannot say "WE baptize you), if the proper form is not used, the sacrament is invalid. So my question is, are the consecrations in Italy invalid, since the words used have a different meaning than what Jesus said and intended?**

A: Thanks for the question. There are a couple of points to be made here and they are covered briefly and clearly in this [ARTICLE](#).

The words of institution are prescribed by the Roman Missal not any of the four places that the words of institution are offered in the Bible – [Matthew 26:26-28](#); [Mark 14:22-24](#); [Luke 22:14-20](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23-27](#). In most cases if a small change is made in the form (words used) the sacrament remains valid even if the consecration is illicit (did not follow the prescribed form). Clearly a significant change in form would be problematic. As Jimmy Akin says in this [ARTICLE](#), “Although the use of any other words of consecration whatsoever is both gravely illicit and gravely sinful, it is not necessarily invalid. So long as the words used for consecration express the fact that ‘This is my Body’ and ‘This is . . . my Blood,’ the consecration will be valid. The other words used further specify and elaborate the purposes of Christ’s sacrifice and of the sacrament, but they do not pertain to the basic reality of Christ’s real presence under the forms of bread and wine. Consequently, they are not necessary to bring about the Real Presence (see N. Halligan, *The Sacraments and Their Celebration*, 67).”

That said, another thing to consider is that the Roman missal is promulgated in Latin and then translated into the vernacular language (e.g., Italian, English, Spanish, etc...). The Vatican approves the translation and verifies that the translators used language that conveys the meaning of the Latin text. If you had attended multiple masses in different Churches and heard “per tutti”, it is quite possible, that is what the Italian translation of the Latin Roman Missal calls for. This [ARTICLE](#) seems to indicate that this is indeed the case and this question has been asked before.

**Q: I'm preparing to make my first valid confession. If a person has committed a mortal sin thousands of times since their last valid confession, is it appropriate to use a phrase like "a lot" for the numbering of the sin or is it necessary to give an estimate? Any Church written documents to support the correct answer are appreciated.**

A: I am thrilled that you are about to receive one of God's greatest gifts to us – the sacrament of reconciliation. The pertinent element of the [Code of Canon Law](#) that addresses your question is [Canon 988](#). That Canon states that you are, "...obliged to confess in kind and number all grave sins committed since baptism and not yet remitted." If you don't know an exact number, you can give a best estimate or provide an approximation (e.g., "several times").

That said, what you are describing having committed thousands of times could best be described as a habitual sin and you should be clear about that with your confessor. I would simply state that, "I have been struggling with sin of X for Y years and have committed it thousands of times over that period. I am truly sorry for offending God through this sin and desire the strength to avoid it moving forward." In that statement you are providing the confessor with a clear picture of the habitual nature of the sin while expressing your sincere desire to cease committing this sin. Your confessor may ask you a couple of questions regarding the circumstances under which this sin occurs to provide some advice on avoiding the near occasion of that sin going forward.

Many of us have struggled with this type of habitual, and in some cases, addictive sin. Rest assured that the grace you receive in the Sacrament will not only absolve you from those sins committed in the past but increase your ability to resist it moving forward. You may still commit it, but the more frequently you take advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation, the stronger you will become, giving you the ability to avoid and resist the temptation that leads you to it.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

## Week of 06/05

**Q: Why during daily mass at HFC does the parish respond "Blessed be God Forever" twice during consecration? Yet not at the Sunday or Saturday vigil masses. Where do I find other questions and their answers thru this app?**

A: Let's start with the last question first. You can find the all the blue bucket questions and answer published on our website on this page => <https://www.hforange.org/faith-formation> If you scroll down the page you will see the button to both submit a new question and see all past answers.



As for your first question during the Sunday Masses there is an offertory song that is sung at this point in the Mass. As a result, the Celebrant says the prayers silently as opposed to saying them out loud as done during daily Mass. The prayers are the same in both cases, but since the assembly is already engaged in singing the offertory song as the gifts are brought to the altar there is no opportunity for the Celebrant to say the prayers out loud and for the assembly to respond. On those occasions where the Sunday Masses are celebrated without music you would indeed hear the Celebrant praying out loud and the assembly would provide the response, "Blessed be God Forever."

Just an FYI – This portion of the Mass is called the Liturgy of the Eucharist not the consecration. The consecration takes place within the Liturgy of the Eucharist as the Celebrant prays the Eucharistic Prayer and we hear him repeat the words of institution that Christ used at the last supper (e.g., "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, For this is my body, Which will be given up for you.").

**Q: Hi there! I just had a quick question regarding some reading suggestions. I was wondering if someone could point me toward some good books or writings regarding general Catholic moral theology, Catholic social teaching, and christology. I'm not really looking for anything to in-death but just some material that an interested layman like me could use to learn a little more about those things specifically. Thanks in advance and God bless!!!**

**A:** It is awesome that you want to dive deeper into our faith. My first suggestion to you would be the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). The Catechism may be the second-best book ever written after the library of books that is the Bible. The Catechism provides brief, accessible / easy to read, content organized across four pillars of our faith: 1) What We Believe (The Profession of Faith), 2) The Liturgy and Sacraments (The Celebration of the Christian Mystery), 3) Catholic Moral and Social Teaching (Life in Christ) and 4) Prayer (Christian Prayer). It comes with an amazing subject index and a cross reference system that will allow a reader to easily see the connections across the four pillars.

For Christology you can start by examining [CCC 422-483](#) (these are paragraph numbers not page numbers – don't be daunted). If you want to delve deeper into the mysteries of Christ's life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension you can move onto [CCC 512-682](#). The great news with the Catechism is it has exceptional footnotes with references to Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, and teachings found in Magisterial documents, so if you are looking for further reading you have suggestions at hand.

For Moral Theology you can jump to [CCC 1699-1802](#) for a great primer. You can then follow that up with [CCC 1846-1876](#) to get an accurate handle on sin. In between is a great section on Virtue that you can go back and peruse. For Catholic Social Teaching you can move on to [CCC 1877-1948](#). You can then dig into the second section of pillar three ([CCC 2052-2577](#)) to get a specific understanding of how Catholic Moral Theology and Social Teaching play out on modern life as it relates to the Ten Commandments.

If you wanted more on Moral Theology and Social teaching after the Catechism you can't go wrong with William May's, *Introduction to Moral Theology* and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace's, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

I can't stress enough the power of starting with the Catechism. It is an amazing publication that was a great gift to the Body of Christ during Pope Saint John Paul II's pontificate. Every Catholic household should have on placed directly beneath its bible and both should be worn from use.

**Q: Can I use Kosher salt which has been blessed by a Rabbi around the house the same way I use blessed salt which has been blessed by a Priest or do I need to have the |Kosher salt reblessed by a Priest? Thank you.**

**A:** Thanks for the question. It is an excellent one. The short answer is "Yes, you would need to have the salt blessed by a Priest or Deacon. This [ARTICLE](#) provides a nice overview of the Sacramental nature of blessed salt that includes a little history. Below is a excerpt from this article that will help explain why it must be blessed by a Priest / Deacon.

*"As in the case of all sacramentals, its power comes not from the sign itself, but by means of the Church's official (liturgical, not private) prayer of blessing—a power the Church derives from Christ himself (see Matt. 16:19 and 18:18). As the Vatican II document on the Liturgy states (art. 61), both Sacraments and sacramentals sanctify us, not of themselves, but by power flowing from the redemptive act of Jesus, elicited by the Church's intercession to be directed through those external signs and elements. Hence sacramentals like blessed salt, holy water, medals, etc. are not to be used superstitiously as having self-contained power, but as "focus-points" funneling one's faith toward Jesus, just as a flag is used as a "focus-point" of patriotism, or as handkerchiefs were used to focus faith for healing and deliverance by Paul (Acts 19:12)."*

Since a Rabbi does not recognize Christ as the savior and he has not received Holy Orders, his blessing would mean no more than a blessing offered by your or I in the name of the one, true God. Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are given the power to act in persona Christi (In the person of Christ) to varying degrees (Bishop-Priest-Deacon). As a result, their blessing is efficacious in providing a blessing that calls on the power of Christ.

## Week of 05/22

**Q: I have a 7year old granddaughter who asks the hard questions. She asked why Jesus lives in heaven and not on earth with us. I heard Fr. Sy's homily on the subject. I tried to adjust my explanation to her age. Perhaps I did not do such a great job because the conversation ended when she said she does not want to die to be with God and our family. Please help!**

**A:** That is a hard question for sure. It's one that most adults don't consider so I give your granddaughter a lot of credit. I am going to try to give you an answer to a couple of different questions here in a form that I think a 7-year-old can understand.

The reason Jesus simply didn't stay is because God loves us. True love is something that cannot be forced – it must be chosen. You can ask your granddaughter if she could be forced to love someone or if she would want someone to try to force her to love them. If Jesus stayed on earth after the resurrection, it would not be long before everyone was forced to recognize who He is – God (He could not be killed, He would never age, He could do anything). At that point, people would no longer have a choice and would be forced to at least pretend to love God as there would be no doubt that He is real. We would be little more than puppets or slaves and not the beloved daughters and sons of God we were created to be.

God doesn't want that kind of love – a love that comes out of fear of the consequences. God loves us so much that He is willing to allow us to choose not to love Him, so that when we do make a choice to love Him, it is a choice of free will. God created us in His image and likeness. That means that the two great powers He has – the ability to think/reason (He knows all) and the ability to choose (He can do all) – were given to us (what he has in an infinite amount we have as part of His creation). God does not want to violate our dignity as human beings endowed with an eternal soul. God wants us to use our gifts to come to know Him and then freely choose Him overall all other things. God is willing to risk that we will choose against Him to ensure our free will is not violated because He loves us so much.

As for dying the good news is that we do not die. Our current bodies will grow old and wear out, but our souls are immortal and can never die. This life on earth is just a blink of the eye in comparison to the amount of life we have next. We are placed here on earth to learn how to do two things – love God and love each other like God loves us. Our bodies are designed to last just long enough for us to learn how to do those two things. Some people learn more quickly than others and their bodies will wear out faster. Others take a little bit longer and may live to a ripe old age until they finally learn. Once we do learn those two things, we get to put them to use in heaven with all the family and friends that learned before us.

You can think of physical death on earth as a sort of graduation. Once in heaven there will be no pain or suffering as there can not be when everyone there has mastered love. When we are in heaven, we will be able cheer on our friends and family members on earth and, if they ask for our help, we will be able to get Jesus to help them as we will be close to Him. It is a great thing to have family and friends in heaven that can call on Jesus to help us while we are here on earth learning. It makes it much easier for us to succeed in life and then, when we “graduate” to heaven, we can look forward to helping others.

On top of that after everyone who ever was and ever will be is given the time they need on earth to master love, Jesus is coming back. When Jesus comes back, we will all be re-united with what is known as a glorified version of our bodies. It will be our body, but now it won't decay and wear out. It will also have special abilities like giving us the ability to be anywhere we want just by thinking about it and being able to change our appearance at will. It will be like a superhero body that we get to keep forever! The completion of our time on earth is nothing to be afraid of. It is something to look forward to as long as we succeed in learning how to love God and neighbor, as it means we have become masters of love and will now be able to help others do the same!

**Q: What is the difference between justification and salvation. Can you lose justification like salvation?**

**A:** That's a good question. Let's start with a definition of terms so we are on the same page. The Glossary of the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) defines justification as, "The gracious action of God which frees us from sin and communicates "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" ([Romans 3:22](#)). Justification is not only the remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man." The Glossary defines salvation as, "The forgiveness of sins and restoration of friendship with God, which can be done by God alone." Since the term "sanctification" was used in defining "justification" I think it's worth digging into its meaning as well. The Glossary defines sanctifying grace as, "The grace which heals our human nature wounded by sin by giving us a share in the divine life of the Trinity. It is a habitual, super-natural gift which continues the work of sanctifying us – of making us 'perfect', holy and Christlike."

We are initially justified through God's gift of Baptism as our sins are remitted and we enter the Christian life – friendship with God. As we progress through life God continues to offer us sanctifying grace and, by accepting it, we grow in holiness and can overcome our attraction to sin (concupiscence) so that we are able to avoid it more faithfully. When we do sin, if the sin is grave, we can lose our justification (friendship with God) and it is through the Sacrament of reconciliation (A.K.A. confession, penance, conversion) that our justification is restored. From a Catholic perspective we can say salvation begins with justification (our initial justification in Baptism, or our return to a justified state through reconciliation). Meanwhile, sanctification is how we grow in holiness by accepting God's freely given grace so we can avoid sin and deepen our bond with God in this life as we prepare for the life to come.

So, the answer is "Yes." We can lose our justification, but Christ not only saved us from sin and death; He provided us the means to be "re-justified" after baptism through reconciliation if (I should say "when" for most of us) we commit grave sin and separate ourselves from God. All the while, God continues to offer us sanctifying grace (e.g., through the Liturgy and Sacraments) so we can grow in holiness and become more Christlike.

**Q: Who should come first? Husband's aging mother or disabled wife right before surgery so that they would not be left alone?**

**A:** I usually open by thanking inquirers for the question submitted. This one is a tough one in that the answer is context dependent, and there is no definitive Catholic teaching on this. As a result, I am not sure how thankful I am. That said, I will do my best to offer an opinion as a faithful Catholic, spouse, and son.

This is the basic question of priority – mother or wife. All things being equal I would have to go with Jesus when He quotes Genesis ([Genesis 2:24](#)) saying, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder." ([Matthew 19:5-6](#)) When all things are equal the spouse clearly takes priority.

However, context could change everything, and that equality of situation may not be present in each situation. For example, if your husband is the only one that could be with his aging mother who was in danger of death while your surgery was not life threatening and there were others

(children, siblings, friends) that could be with you; I would hope you would encourage him to go be with his mother. On the other hand, the balance would clearly shift in the other direction if your husband's aging mother was in no imminent danger of death while you were about to undergo potentially life-threatening surgery - there is no question he should be with you, and I would hope his mother would recognize that.

The bottom line is that all things being equal, the marital bond overrides the familial bond as the "two have become one." After God, no one should be a higher priority than one's spouse. However, every situation is unique and without contextual details, it is difficult to offer a definitive opinion. This is especially true when you consider that the fourth commandment tells us to, "Honor your father and your mother" ([Exodus 20:12](#)) and Jesus condemned the Pharisees for permitting that commandment to be violated (see [Mark 7:1-13](#) – a story that involves not providing for an aging parent).

I hope that helps to some extent.

**Q: When others question my faith or do not believe in it, I am not sure if I should stand up for myself and not really persuade them but just describe why maybe?? Thoughts....**

**A:** Thanks for the question. It is an important one and a question that we all are faced with answering at one point or another. I like to go to Sacred Scripture to start and offer one of my favorite passages of the Bible... "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." ([1 Peter 3:15-16](#)) In this passage St. Peter is telling us that we should all be able to discuss why we believe what we believe and what impact living a life of faith has had on our lives ("...an account for the hope that is in you...").

Every time I pray the Rosary, I pray the three initial Hail Mary's (for Faith, Hope, and Charity) for my children. I pray that they accept God's grace to deepen their embrace of the faith, so that they may live lives of hope (for eternal joy), and put into effect Jesus' command to love God and neighbor ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)). That is the beauty of our faith – the more you embrace it and surrender to God's will the greater the hope you have and the greater the ability to have to love unconditionally. Those things lead to a life that can only be described as joyful and is something I want for all those I encounter. As Saint Paul tells us, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. For Jew first and then Greek." ([Romans 1:16](#)) Shouldn't we try to save everyone we can?

You don't have to know everything about the faith to share it. Share what you experience and what you do know and then make a commitment to find the answer to any question that you are asked that you are not prepared to answer. As Pope Saint Paul VI tells us, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." ([EVANGELII NUNTIANDI](#) 41, Pope Paul VI, 1975) Be a great witness to the results of the faith and you will inspire those that question it to learn about what you have. At the same time we have a great reference for the deposit of faith in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). It is a beautiful means of answering most questions and exploring it can only deepen your own faith.

I hope that helps and remember that Jesus gave us all the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)) so we should all seek to teach others to observe what He commanded.

## Week of 05/15

### **Q: In what order were the 12 apostles called by Jesus? Is that information available?**

**A:** Thanks for the question. It's a good one. Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer.

In the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) we are presented with similar stories related to the call of the apostles and similarly ordered lists of all twelve. In all three synoptics Simon, James and John are called first with both Matthew (Matthew 4:18-22) and Mark (Mark 1:16-20) listing Simon, Andrew, James, and John as the first. Luke doesn't specifically name Andrew (Luke 5:1-11), but it could be reasonably speculated that he was called along with Peter his brother.

All three synoptics then go on to relate the call of Matthew (AKA Levi) as seen in Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:13-14, and Luke 5:27-28. However, we do not get a complete timeline of the call of the remaining seven in any of the synoptics. After naming the first five all three synoptics simply go on to list the remaining seven of the original twelve – Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas (AKA Didymus), James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus (AKA Judas, not the Iscariot), Simon the Cananean (called a Zealot), and Judas the Iscariot as seen in Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:13-19, and Luke 6:12-16.

The situation is further complicated by the Gospel of John which presents a slightly different picture as Andrew become Jesus' first follower along with another disciple (speculated to be John himself) in John 1:35-39. From there we hear about the call of Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel (thought to be AKA Bartholomew) to round out the first five (John 1:40-51). John then mentions that there were twelve in John 6:67 and later calls out Judas Iscariot (John 6:71), Thomas (John 11:16) and the other Judas (not the Iscariot, AKA Thaddeus – John 14:22). However, the remaining four go unnamed in John's Gospel. This should not be that surprising as John's Gospel was written last and hence most of his readers well aware of who the twelve were as the three synoptic Gospels were in circulation for several decades prior to John's publication.

Scholars have speculated about the actual order in which the Apostles were called for quite some time. I tend to agree with those that put all the Gospels together and see Andrew and John being called first, with Peter and James their brothers following shortly thereafter (makes more sense that they would leave their boats if they already knew who Jesus was). Then comes Philip and Bartholomew / Nathaniel and Matthew / Levi. That gives us the first seven leaving Thomas (AKA Didymus), James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus (AKA Judas, not the Iscariot), Simon the Cananean (called a Zealot), and Judas the Iscariot being called at some point thereafter.

Immediately following the Ascension, we see Matthias (who had been a follower of Jesus during His ministry) called to replace Judas the Iscariot in Acts 1:21-26 to once again round out the twelve. Finally, we have Paul called by Jesus in Acts 9:1-22 and then naming himself an Apostle in 1 Corinthians 9:1. That brings the total number of Apostles identified in the New Testament up to fourteen in total – the original twelve, Matthias to restore the twelve, and Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

I am sure that is not the clear answer you were looking for, but I hope that helps a bit. Please feel free to write again any time.

**Q: I was born into the Protestant faith around 20 or 22 years of age, so for many decades I have been taught that there ARE 400 years of silence and that is why the Deuterocanonical books cannot be accepted. Last year and this year I have been listening to the “Bible in a Year” podcast as well as the new “Catechism in a Year” podcast. The Bible in a Year seems to suggest that GOD was NOT silent....basically ever. My question for you today is....what Sacred writings were created inside of those 400 years that I could point to with my friends and family to demonstrate that that excuse cannot be used.**

**A:** The 400 years of silence refers to what many Protestants, whether they are part of a mainline Protestant community (e.g., Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterian, etc...) or independent Evangelical community, believe was a 400-year period between what they considered the last Old Testament book – Malachi – and the first New Testament books. This is an argument that has been used to justify the elimination of the seven deuterocanonical books (Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, First and Second Maccabees) from the Bible which is something the first Protestants did, starting with Martin Luther, about 500 years ago. For the 1300+ years of Christianity prior to this, the 73 books of the Catholic bible were considered inspired text by most Christians and by the 4<sup>th</sup> century (1600 years ago) the Catholic Canon of the Bible was the accepted biblical Canon in Christianity worldwide.

Strangely enough, to support this theory Protestants often appeal to one of the Deuterocanonical books they reject- a verse in 1 Maccabees. That verse states that “Thus there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.” ([1 Macc. 9:27](#)). The verse is used to support the claim that there were no prophets between Malachi and John the Baptist and hence the Deuterocanonical books are not Sacred Scripture. At the time, it was believed all the deuterocanonical books were written during this “silent period.” That said, it is clearly a circular argument – using one of the books being excluded to justify their exclusion.

However, this claim has even bigger issues. Thanks to some major archeological advancement over the last century; Biblical and Historical Scholars have now determined that only three of the deuterocanonical books – 1 and 2 Maccabees, and Wisdom - were written in the four hundred year “period of silence”. The remaining four books were written 1000-500 years prior to Christ’s birth completely undermining the very claim used to exclude them. Finally, Protestants also have misread the verse in 1 Maccabees believing that it meant there would be

no new prophets. If that is what it meant, then John the Baptist (John was clearly a prophet) and other New Testament writers never would have come, and our Bible would end with the Old Testament.

[This Article](#) by Jimmy Akin provides some more detail regarding why this argument for the “period of silence” has been debunked, which is why very few modern Protestant Scholars will reference it today. This is one of the reasons why the quote, “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant” (Saint John Cardinal Henry Newman), has become so widely used. As we have learned more about the ancient world and uncovered more ancient writings (particularly of the early Church Fathers), many of the traditional Protestant claims against Catholicism have been debunked.

I hope that helps. Jesus Christ prayed that we would all be one ([John 17:21](#)) and, hopefully, someday we can all be one again as we were for most of Christian history. What Protestant and Catholics have in common is far greater than what divides us. We should all pray that as we continue to learn and dialog more, the Holy Spirit will work to bring us back together and we can put the last 500 years of a split in the Body of Christ behind us.

Please write again.

**Q: Would you please explain the use of a scape goat in Leviticus 16 and how to reconcile what today would likely be considered animal cruelty with our idea of an all good God? I understand the concept behind the use of a scapegoat but, considering the likely accompanying physical abuse of the animal, along with release of the animal in a barren desert to die and even shoving it down a cliff, the question has to be asked "how can a good God command such actions?"**

**A:** Thanks for the question. I want to expand it a bit.... “How can an all-good God command animal sacrifice (e.g., [Leviticus 16:1-22](#)), condone genocide (e.g., [Deuteronomy 20:16-18](#)) or require any of the others seemingly morally corrupt things that are attributed to God’s command in the Old Testament? How do we explain all those instances where we find conflict with Him being “all-good?”

There are a couple of elements to this answer. Let’s start with what Sacred Scripture is...the gradual revelation of who God is and who we are as His beloved sons and daughters. God did not reveal everything all at once as we could not have accepted it. Rather, he revealed Himself to us gradually as we matured from our initial barbaric state to the level of civilization that existed during the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus. This revelation and the instructions God provided were his means of helping us “evolve” so that we could indeed join Him in eternal life.

Over the course of that revelation God used methods that we could understand at each point in our maturity. We see this in how we raise our own children. A human parent uses different methods to discipline and teach his 5 year-old than those employed with his far more intellectually and morally mature 16-year-old. This is why God allowed things like divorce in the time of Moses (the Israelites could not have accepted anything else at that point) but that He makes it clear that divorce is morally unacceptable in the time of Jesus. It was not until “the fullness of time” arrived that we were prepared intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and



socially to recognize the truth of that teaching. Prior to this, God had to use means of teaching us that we could accept and understand to prepare us for the ultimate truth that Jesus reveals.

A secondary element of this is that God is the author of life. Our lives and the lives of all of his creatures on earth are freely given gifts. We have no right to our lives, nor do we have any right to a certain length of life. God can choose how much or how little of his gift we are given as it is a gift that comes from him. Any amount of life that God gives His creations is something that is undeserved and should be accepted for the great gift it is. If God believes the death of one or more of His creatures can bring about a greater good, He will allow that creature's life to end. There is no justification for being angry that we did not get as big a gift as someone else as it was a gift, not something earned. God's focus is on maximizing the good of His creatures for eternal life, not this life.

Finally, we must understand that there is a significant difference between a human being, endowed with the gift of being in the image and likeness of God (we possess both intellect and will – [Genesis 1:26](#)), and an animal. The animals were created by God for our use and care ([Genesis 1:29-30](#)). This does not mean we can treat anything that God created for us with disdain – we are to be caretakers of creation not abusers of it – see the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) paragraphs [CCC 2415-2418](#) and [CCC 2456-2457](#). However, using animals to help us learn while we were maturing is perfectly acceptable. Once we matured to a certain level this was no longer necessary and God made it clear that it could no longer be condoned as the Catechism demonstrates.

I hope that helps. If, after reviewing this, you believe you need some more, please write again.

**Q: Hi, so I am in a discussion/debate with a friend on the rationality of believing that God exists. I think I have made good strides but I need some help bringing the point home. I asked him would it be irrational to believe what the disciples who lived with and saw what Jesus did, have to say about him? And this was the response: "So you believing what the disciples saw and experienced about Jesus probably isn't irrational. But the fact you just accept that Jesus definitely performed those miracles is irrational. And the fact that you believe he is god based on those miracles is also irrational." I feel like I know what I have to say but I just don't know how to put it into words. Would appreciate any assistance.**

**A:** Thanks for the question. It sounds like you are in an interesting debate. So it seems like your friend is making two claims that he should be able to prove: 1) That the historicity of the Bible is questionable, and, 2) That Jesus is not God. You should ask him to prove these points – he is making claims and should therefore be able to support those claims. I hope he has some reasonable arguments himself. That said, let's demonstrate your arguments are reasonable.

#### **Historicity of the Bible as an Account of Jesus' Life:**

If your friend accepts things as historically valid such as the existence of Alexander the Great he should know that he is basing that belief based upon documents that are 260-370 years removed from the actual events. He is also doing so based upon a very small number of fragmentary documents. Compare this to the New Testament writings that were written within

20-70 years of Jesus's ministry where we literally have thousands of copies of the texts that do not conflict. Historians will tell you that the closer the writings are to the actual events and the more copies of those writings that are in circulation the more historically reliable those documents are. This is because you have eyewitnesses that are still alive that could contradict them. In the absence of those contradictions (keep in mind that both the Jewish religious authorities and the Romans would have loved to contradict them) there is a good reason to believe the record of events. This [ARTICLE](#) will give you some more on this front. Even better...we have non-Biblical sources speaking about Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and fame for miraculous signs. This [ARTICLE](#) will provide a nice summary of that.

### **Did Jesus Perform Miracles?**

Let's go straight to the biggest of them all - the resurrection. If you believe in the resurrection, then there should be no problem believing in the other violations of the laws of nature that are depicted as miraculous signs of Jesus. This [ARTICLE](#) does a great job of demonstrating the reasonableness of this miracle. This [PODCAST](#) will give you even more to work with. If your friend can honestly tell you these arguments are not reasonable, I don't believe he is approaching the discussion with an openness to the possibility he is wrong, and all intelligent people should always be open to that possibility.

### **Is Jesus God?**

This one is pretty simple.

- Jesus claimed to be God. His Apostles supported that claim, and He never corrects them. Check out these: [ARTICLE 1](#); [ARTICLE 2](#); [ARTICLE 3](#)
- He performs miracles as evidence of that claim and the assertion that He could forgive sins (something only God can do). [HERE](#) is a great example of one you can review with your friend that address historicity.
- There are over 350 Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that are born out in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Review a couple of examples – [HERE](#) & [HERE](#)
- As C.S. Lewis said, "Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher." Your friend must make the call – he is either claiming Jesus is a madman or evil. You should ask him to prove one of those points if he does not accept that Jesus is God.

I hope that helps. I don't want to overwhelm you (or your friend) with too much detail in one shot. If, after reviewing this evidence, you believe you need some more, please write again.

Week of 04/09

**Q: Is it allowed for a lay person to carry the monstrance and repose the blessed Sacrament?**

**A:** Thanks for the question. It's one that is often asked in the environment we live in with a shortage of clergy. The simple answer is, "Yes". Just as we can have extraordinary ministers of holy communion carry (in a [ciborium](#) or [pyx](#)) and distribute the Blessed Sacrament we can have lay people support certain elements of Eucharistic Adoration such as exposing and reposing the Blessed Sacrament.

The [Code of Canon Law](#) defines this in [Canon 943](#) which states, "The minister of exposition of the blessed Sacrament and of the eucharistic blessing is a priest or deacon. In special circumstances the minister of exposition and deposition alone, but without the blessing, is an acolyte, and extraordinary minister of holy communion, or another person deputed by the local Ordinary, in accordance with the regulations of the diocesan Bishop." Notice that the local Bishop can define the conditions under which this is possible and who is able to do it.

So, just as a extraordinary minister of holy communion cannot consecrate the Eucharist or offer the same type of blessing one with Holy Orders can offer during the distribution of communion (read about that [HERE](#)) a designated lay person cannot offer the exposition or benediction blessings during adoration.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: Can we explain the discrepancy in the Gospels regarding the time of day of the Friday crucifixion? John's Gospel states Jesus was still with Pilate at the sixth hour (noon) before being sent for crucifixion. Does it follow that Jesus was only on cross for 3 hours according to John? Gospel of Mark says crucifixion was at 3rd hour (9am) and that he hung on cross until death at 9th hour (3pm)p. The Matthew and Luke times seem to line up with Mark's (Synoptics). Seems like John, the only actual Gospel writer who was a witness at the crucifixion (that we know for certain), would be more accurate in his recollection? Just curious. Thanks so much for everything!**

**A:** Thanks for the question. Many who participated in both the Palm Sunday ([Matthew 26:14-27:66](#)) and Good Friday ([John 18:1-19:42](#)) reading of the passion this year may have noticed this apparent discrepancy. This issue, along with the apparent discrepancy between the Gospel of John and the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) regarding the day of Jesus's death, are two timing elements that many skeptics point to in an effort to discredit the historicity of the Gospels.

First some background... The Jews of the 1<sup>st</sup> century broke both the day (sunrise to sundown) and night (sundown to sunrise) into four three-hour increments. As a practice they would identify the time an event occurred by rounding up or down to one of these three-hour increments unless there was a need to provide the specific hour an event occurred. We see this consistently in the synoptic Gospels when times are identified within a passage.

This [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers summarizes these timing issues and proposes a feasible explanation for the apparent discrepancy you have identified. In that article you will read, "...it becomes plausible to interpret Mark's (and Matthew's) 'third hour' to mean any time between 9 a.m. and noon. Mark just rounds down to the 'third hour' whereas John rounds up to the sixth. John's rounding up is supported by the fact that he says it was 'about the sixth hour' ([John 19:14](#)). Given that Mark and John are approximating the time of Jesus' death, and they both

approximate that time to be some time in the second quarter of the day, we can conclude there is no contradiction.”

Once you recognize the practice of rounding up or down to the nearest quarter day when discussing event timing, you can understand how both the passages in the synoptics and John’s Gospel provide an accurate communication of the timing while pointing to different quarters of the day.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: I just looked into the dietary laws of Leviticus and chapter 11 talks about the dietary laws and the first thing it says is that God gave the dietary laws to Israel. Earlier you said they were not laws of God. Is there explanation for Leviticus 11:1.**

**A:** Let’s start with the Basics. I should have been clearer with talking about the 613 Levitical Laws and distinguishing what is meant by Laws of God versus laws of men, but it is a long explanation, and I did not want to get into all the details, but now that you are asking for them here you go...

The old laws are all instructions inspired by God for the nation of Israel. However, there are three types of laws in the old law (first five books of the Bible – the Pentateuch) – the moral law, the judicial law, and the ceremonial law. The moral law is the law of God written on the human heart spelling out right and wrong. It is also known as the natural law found in all cultures across all time. Religious or not, atheist or Christian; humans have always recognized what we call the law of God – the moral law – that are binding on all humanity.

Until the time of Samuel and the introduction of the first Jewish King (Saul) God Himself served as Israel’s King. Kings (or whatever legislative system a people embrace) create judicial laws governing how that people will live in community and with neighboring communities. Unlike, God’s moral law, which is timeless and unchanging, the judicial laws of any nation are for the men of that nation alone in a specific time and place. That means they can and do change just like the laws in the United States can and do change as different needs arise.

The ceremonial law is primarily about making you holy because the ceremonial law, as we’re going to see, is about regulating the worship of God. Holy means to be set-apart. The ceremonial laws were designed to set the Jewish people apart from the nations that surrounded them. God knew that unless they remained “set apart” it would be easy for His chosen people to slip into the practices of the nations that surrounded them. It’s a short leap from adopting the judicial and ceremonial laws of a surrounding nation to assuming their (not God’s) moral laws.

The ceremonial law existed in large part to create an ethnic distinctive cultural identity for Israel, and that was great, but that purpose was to prepare them for the Messiah. And so, when the Messiah comes and the doors of the church are open to the Gentiles, the need to create a non-Gentile people goes away. We want the Gentiles and the Jews to intermingle now, as Christians. And so, the ceremonial law goes away because its purpose is fulfilled. It’s not abolished because it was evil of itself, it’s that it’s been fulfilled.

As an example, the old law included many dietary regulations which were instituted as a preparation for Jesus' teaching on the moral law. Jesus discussed these laws: "Hear me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him." And when he had entered the house, and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so passes on?" Thus he declared all foods clean. (Mark 7:14-19) The Catechism explains, "Jesus perfects the dietary law, so important in Jewish daily life, by revealing its pedagogical meaning through a divine interpretation . . . What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts . . ." (CCC 582).

St. Paul taught similarly concerning other Old Testament law: "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon . . . These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ . . . Why do you submit to regulations, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:16-17; 20-23) In this passage we can see that Paul recognized that much of the Old Testament law was instituted to set the stage for the new law that Christ would usher in. Much of the old law's value could be viewed in this regard.

Jesus' teaching about the Sabbath indicates similar value in part of the Old Testament regulation of the Sabbath: Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath." (Matt. 12:1-8) Clearly, Jesus indicated that He—not the Old Testament—had authority over the Sabbath, and its regulation was not as rigid as the Pharisees thought. In fact, once Jesus would endow the hierarchy of his Church with his own authority (Matt. 16:19; 18:18), regulation of worship would become the domain of the Church.

Now Jesus does tell us, that, "Not one jot or tittle of the Law will pass away until all are fulfilled." But he also acknowledges that not all those laws come immediately from God. For example, in Matthew chapter 19 he says, "Moses gave you the law concerning divorce, but from the beginning it was not intended to be so," and he quotes Genesis 2:24, you know, "the two shall become one flesh," and he incorporates that into his own teaching where he elevates marriage to the level of Sacrament. So Jesus has, within his own teaching, the idea that we teach today as Catholics, that while all of the Old Testament is inspired by God absolutely, some of the laws are, as Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God who spoke in days of old or in the Old Covenant in various and

partial ways, now in these last days has spoken through His Son.” He’s given us His definitive Word through His Son.

God was taking a very violent tribal culture and trying to mature it to make it a vehicle capable of sharing His message with the world (that is what the chosen people were chosen to do). God doesn’t give them the Sermon on the Mount all at once; He gives them bits and pieces. God allows them to use many of the laws that they were already familiar with but over time He helps them, elevates the discourse, and helps them to make better laws (judicial and ceremonial). God doesn’t change everything immediately. So there are still aspects of the old law that you and I would cringe at, that God permits, but it’s not what we would call God’s perfect will - it’s His consequent will. As a result of the sin and rebellion of Adam and Eve, and centuries of rebellion that left people in this messy state, God comes in and begins to fix things over the course of an 1800-2000 year period until He perfects it in Christ. Finally, we learn in the letter to the Hebrews that, “... where there is a change in priesthood, there is of necessity a change of law.”

Now the old law had its place. In ancient tribal cultures if somebody from a neighboring tribe rapes somebody in your family, the tribal law was: “I’m gonna kill your whole family and your whole tribe and eliminate your whole nation.” That’s the way things worked. God presents the, “eye for an eye tooth for tooth” to mitigate against that, to bring in a more civilized law leading up to, of course, Matthew 5:44, “Love your enemies,” which the ancient people could never even have fathomed. The judicial law was slowly modified to elevate the people as they could tolerate the elevation.

Bottom line to what I am saying is this:

- 1) The Moral law is the law of God for all peoples, for all time and all circumstances.
- 2) The judicial and ceremonial laws are laws of men - for specific men, at a specific time, and for a specific purpose.

The judicial and ceremonial laws are laws of men that can and do change as the men and conditions change. God was the giver of the laws of men for Israel up until Saul was named King, but those judicial and ceremonial laws remained laws of men (meaning men at a specific time and place) and not the universal moral law of God.

I hope that helps.

**Q: If I want to marry a Christian man, will he need to convert into Catholic? or does it not matter since it’s almost the same.**

**A:** Canon Law ([Canon 1086](#) & [1124](#)) prohibits the marriage of a Baptized Catholic to a Christian Baptized into another ecclesial community (e.g., Protestant) without the express permission of a competent authority (e.g., Bishop). [Canon 1125](#) defines what the conditions are under which that permission would be granted. The bottom line is you can marry a non-Catholic Baptized Christian, but it will require a little paperwork and some discussions between you, your future spouse and a Priest to make sure your future spouse is fully aware of what is required. He does not have to convert, but he must support your continued growth in the Catholic faith.

**Q: What are the church’s thoughts about drinking and smoking?**

**A:** Drinking and smoking are in themselves not evil. They can rise to the level of evil and mortal sin when alcohol or tobacco is abused. Alcohol abuse can deprive the drinker of the ability to exercise his/her God given reason (temporarily or permanently). Both smoking and drinking in excess can lead to long term health issues as well and any self-induced damage to ones body is sinful. You can read more about the Church's teaching on alcohol abuse [HERE](#). You can read more about the Church's teaching on tobacco abuse [HERE](#). You can read more about both in [CCC 2290-2291](#).

**Q: Did Jesus have any other siblings from Mary and Joseph?**

**A:** Thanks for this question. It is one many have because one of the four Marian doctrines is that Mary was perpetually virgin. Yet we read in [Matthew 13:55-56](#), "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?" This seem clear that Jesus had brothers and sisters, right?

Not so fast...The Greek word or its Semitic equivalent that we translate as "brethren" in English was used in the first century for varying degrees of blood relationship. There was no specific word for cousin, uncle, aunt or even stepbrother. As a matter of fact, the Greek word used there - **ἀδελφός** – could be used for close family friends or even people from the same village. Just a few chapters in [Matthew 27:56](#) we find that James and Joseph are the sons of Mary, the wife of Clopas (it is believed that Clopas was St. Joseph's brother).

Finally, at the foot of the Cross Jesus entrust His mother into the hands of the Apostle John in [John 19:26-27](#). If Jesus had siblings from the marriage of Joseph and Mary this action would have been unheard of as the care of Jesus' mother would have fallen to those siblings – anything else would have been scandalous.

It is possible that Jesus had stepbrothers and stepsisters as there is a tradition (not official Church teaching) that St. Joseph was an older widower when he agreed to marry and support Mary who was a consecrated virgin (not an unheard-of arrangement in the 1<sup>st</sup> century). Therefore, Joseph could have had children from his first marriage, and these would be stepbrothers and stepsisters to Jesus. However, that is not documented in accepted revelation and hence is not an official Church teaching.

I hope that helps!

**Q: Hello, I have a question about gossip. I'm around gossip at work all the time and I hate it, I try my best to avoid it but sometimes it seems impossible. Am I considered an accomplice to others gossip if I don't say anything to stop it? Like if someone starts talking bad about another person to me, what am I to do? It's really hard to just tell the person to stop but do I even have to do that or is there something else I can do? I try to change the topic but that doesn't always work. If I don't am I guilty of mortal sin if the gossip is bad enough? Thank you!**

**A:** Thank you for your question. It is an important one as far too many take gossiping far too lightly. [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) offers us a wealth of information regarding the

violation of the eighth commandment (Do not bear false witness) and gossip clearly falls into this realm. In the Catechism's section on "Offenses Against Truth" (CCC 2475-2487) there are two paragraphs in particular that address Gossip – CCC 2477 and CCC 2479.

If you peruse those teachings, I think you will come to your own answer to your question. You have an obligation to try to put a halt to the sinful act and gently offer fraternal correction. You should have respect for all of God's adopted sons and daughters Tom Nash of Catholic Answers states it well when he says, "...part of that respect is gently reminding this person to avoid gossip. Perhaps what he (or she) is saying is true. Even so, humbly ask the person if what's being said is going to edify the person about whom he's talking or instead lead others to speak of and treat the person in a disrespectful way. Or you could gently assert that you love and respect him, but what he's saying about a person's faults and failings to people who didn't know about them is needlessly going to harm that person in the eyes of others."

(<https://www.catholic.com/qa/when-confronted-with-gossip>)

If you are participating in the gossiping, you are at risk of falling into a state of mortal sin. If you don't feel that you are able to offer the fraternal correction outlined above, you could simply excuse yourself from the conversation by stating, "I am sorry. I don't feel comfortable talking about someone who is not present." That may cause the Gossiper to ask you why providing you with an opportunity to do a little evangelization by using the content of CCC 2475-2487.

I am not saying any of this is easy, but Jesus never promised us that following Him would be easy. As a matter of fact, Jesus tells us, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

I commend you for asking the question and want to thank you for forcing me to recognize that I need to take some of the same advice I am giving you above.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: From a Jewish/Catholic perspective, did the sacrifice on the day of atonement were the Jewish peoples sins actually forgiven in full, similar to sacramental confession. (Obviously Confession is different because Christ provided the eternal sacrifice once and for all).**

**A:** Thanks for the question. It is a good one. We can start with the Letter to the Hebrews to get some insight. We find the inspired writer of Hebrews telling us, "For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. ***For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.***" (Hebrews 10:1-4) What the inspired writer is telling us is that the sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic Law were a precursor to the ultimate and efficacious sacrifice of Christ, but that they had no value in regards to remitting the guilt of sin.



The question then becomes, “Why do it?” This [ARTICLE](#) (actually a podcast transcript) provides a good understanding of the history and purpose of sacrifice. It details why God would actually require it if it has no ability to satisfy (HINT – it's part of Human Nature – it is for us).

Meanwhile, this [ARTICLE](#) talks more explicitly about the Jewish sacrificial practices and the value that they provided.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: Hi. I'm an ex Evangelical about to be received into the Catholic church. My question is about going to heaven and avoiding hell . So far I have been getting mixed messages. BTW when I say going to heaven I mean probably via purgatory. 1 dying with no unconfessed mortal sins . 2 doing enough good works and 3 I've been told that it is only the finally impenitent that are lost.**

**A:** Welcome home to the Catholic Church! This is a great question. Both non-Catholics and Catholics alike misunderstand the Catholic doctrine of salvation. Many believe that the Church teaches salvation by works as if Catholics were trying to earn their way to heaven. The Church does NOT teach salvation by our own good works that would be a form of [Pelagianism](#) – a 5<sup>th</sup> century heresy.

The Church believe that salvation is a process by which we come closer to God throughout our life as we participate in the sacraments and accept God's freely given grace that comes through them. We are justified at Baptism, but as we progress through life and reject God's will we sin. This damages our relationship with God. If the sin is grave enough (mortal sin) we can separate ourselves from God completely and lose the sanctifying grace that we received at Baptism.

Only God can save us. If that weren't true, then Christ died for nothing. The REALLY GOOD NEWS is that Jesus knew we were broken and likely to fall victim to our [concupiscence](#) (attraction to sin) so He gave us the great Sacrament of Reconciliation ([John 20:19-23](#)) so that we can repair our relationship with God and restore our state of grace. If we die in a state of sanctifying grace, we are going to heaven. We may need to be cleansed of our attachment to sin and/or pay off and remaining debt of temporal punishment through purgation, but our end state will be with God in heaven. If we die without God's sanctifying grace in our souls, we go to hell.

We do believe that good works are evidence of true faith, but that is not the only role they play. Works also play a role in our final justification. If we take Paul's statements about Abraham being justified by faith in [Galatians 3:6](#) and [Romans 4:3-4](#) and put them together with James's statement about Abraham being justified by his work of offering up Isaac in [James 2:21](#), we rightly conclude that salvation is a process with many points of justification along the path to heaven. The relationship between sanctifying grace and works is described well in [the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 1999-2001](#).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls baptism the sacrament of justification because in it all our previous sins are forgiven (cf. [CCC 1266, 1992](#)). And as I implied above, acts of justification or forgiveness may occur at many points in our lives. For example, when a priest declares a sinner forgiven in confession, this is an act of justification. We insist that many justifications take place in our lives as we journey toward heaven. These acts of justification are necessary for our growth in holiness or sanctification. This [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answer describes the process well.

The bottom line is that we are saved by accepting God's freely given grace and maintaining that grace through life by availing ourselves of the Sacraments that Jesus gave us to heal (us of our sins), strengthen (us against sin), transform (us to be more Christlike and unify us (to Him and each other). Works are a manifestation of that grace but do not in themselves save us. As St. Paul tells us in [Ephesians 2:8-10](#), "For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from you, it is the gift of God. It is not from works so no one may boast. For we are His handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance that we should live in them."

As for the final impenitent being lost we agree that this is the case as Jesus tells us in [Mathew 12:31](#), "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is indeed final impenitence – either an obstinate refusal to recognize sin and seek God's forgiveness or refusing to seek forgiveness believing that one's sin is too great. That is a denial of God's infinite mercy – a blasphemy. If we do not seek God's forgiveness we can not be forgiven and will permanently separate ourselves from God which places us in hell at the end of our earthly lives.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

## Week of 04/02

**Q: A protestant once said that Jesus called his blood "fruit of the vine" as an argument against His real presence of the wine becoming His blood. Any rebuttals / refutes?**

A: Thanks for that question. This is a very old and tired argument that many have tried to use. No reputable protestant scholar would do so anymore and this one has been beaten to death. I am not going to go into too much detail with this one as [THIS ARTICLE](#) from Karlo Broussard provide all the detail you need. I will summarize the key points for you.

- Your protestant friend is referencing [Mark 14:22](#) and [Matthew 26:29](#) where at the Last Supper, following the words of institution, Jesus makes this statement.
- The basic argument is that Jesus is calling the Blood in the cup wine – not His Blood - after He has consecrated it. This ignores the fact that in the Lukan version - [Luke 22:18](#) - Jesus does this before the consecration.
- Even if all three versions had these words after the word of institution it would not matter as "the biblical authors are no strangers to describing things according to their appearance. Scholars call this phenomenological language. We use it even today. For example, the weatherman says the sun will "rise" at 6 a.m. and "set" at 6 p.m.' The sun does not rise and set – that's geocentrism which we know to be false.
- "Another possible explanation is that it's common for a biblical author to describe something according to its prior state."
- "We can admit that there is a mystery as to exactly what Jesus was referring to when He spoke of not drinking the fruit of vine until a future time. Was he referring to the eschatological banquet ([Isaiah 25:6-8](#); [Revelation 19:9](#))? Was he referring to the cup of

suffering he was to drink on the cross ([Mark 10:38-39](#); [Mark 14:36](#))? Perhaps he was referring to both, since the two are related.”

The bottom line is that no modern biblical scholar worth his/her weight – Catholic, protestant, agnostic or atheist – would make this argument today as enough holes have been punched into it to make it unreliable. We simply have a greater understanding of the style of language used and the contextual meaning of that language in first century Palestine to recognize any merit to this argument.

I hope that helps you.

**Q: Ephesians 5:22 – “wives subject yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” What does “subject” mean?**

A: Let’s start by laying out that entire passage as people have done some damage by pulling that verse out alone without the surrounding context....

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The Greek word that is used there is ὑποτάσσω. Depending on its usage it literally means, place or arrange under, subdue/make subject, or underlie. Notice the structure of this passage where St. Paul starts by stating that husband and wives should be subject to each other. St. Paul then goes on to describe how women do that for their husbands and how men do that for their wives (to the point of death in the case of a husband). This is a rich teaching on Catholic marriage that gives a breathtaking glimpse of Jesus’ love for His Church (His bride) and equates it to the love husbands must have for their wives. It is a passage calling for husbands and wives to voluntarily subordinate themselves to each other.

The type of love we are trying to master here on earth is love that cares only for the good of the other – agape love. If you care first for the good of another you are willing to die to your own desires and needs in favor of those of the one you love. That is what this passage is describing.

I hope that helps.

**Q: Our family are secular Franciscans of the Roman Catholic Church-we have a friend who is a member of the Syro-Chaldean Church of North America; in 1991, the name was changed to the Evangelical Apostolic Church of North America. She would like to know if she attends mass in the Catholic Church, can she receive Holy Communion?**

A: This is an excellent question and one that will take a little more information to fully answer. As you may be aware there are 24 Churches that celebrate 6 main rites that are all part of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church in communion with the Pope. The Latin rite which is practiced by the Latin (or Roman) Catholic Church represents the single largest portion of the Catholic Church. The other 23 Churches and 5 rites are described in [THIS ARTICLE](#) quite nicely.

The question is if your friend is part of the Syro-Chaldean Church that is associated with the East Syrian or Chaldean Rite that is part of the Catholic communion. The verbiage on their website (<http://www.syrochaldean.org/>) and the description of the Evangelical Apostolic Church of North America found [HERE](#) is a little vague. At no point do they talk about communion with the universal Church or communion with the Pope. If they are part of the [Syrian Rite](#) in communion with our Church they would be free to receive Holy Communion as they would be fully Catholic.

That said, I am a little cautious based upon the information I can access in the public domain as there are many Churches that have adopted a name that is similar to a Church that is part of the universal Catholic Church. You would need your friend to clarify with her pastor if they are indeed in full communion with the Pope (he would know if she does not).

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: I was baptized in the Church of Christ at age 15, and years later was received into the Catholic Church. The Church of Christ uses a trinitarian formula for baptism, and while I don't remember specifically, I don't have reason to doubt I was baptized correctly as far as that goes. My question is about intent. The person who administered baptism believes in the importance of baptism, although I haven't asked him if he believes in any sort of sanctifying grace attached to the practice. His intent was intact; and so is intent based on the minister's \*understanding\* of baptism? As to my own intent: I specifically said, while in the font(!), that I "knew" baptism doesn't actually \*do\* anything, but that it is an important sign and declaration of my commitment to Christ. Did this sideways view of baptism I had at that time affect my intent and therefore the validity of said Sacrament? Should I have been conditionally baptized when I came into the Church years later? Thank you. (These worries brought to you by Acts 19 and Canon 869.2)**

A: Thanks for the question. I can understand your concern with all the news in the last two years regarding invalid Catholic Baptisms. That said, I believe you can rest easy. Since the [Donatist](#) controversy in the 4<sup>th</sup> century the Church has taught that the validity of the sacraments does not depend upon the personal holiness of either the minister or the recipient. The Sacraments are made efficacious by Christ Himself and as long as the proper matter and form are used the graces of the sacrament are conferred even if the recipient refuses to or is unable to accept them at that time. For a little more clarity on both this and "intent" check out [THIS BRIEF ARTICLE](#) on [Catholic Answers](#).

The Church has also determined that for our separated brothers and sisters in Protestant ecclesial communities that, "Baptism by immersion, or by pouring, together with the Trinitarian

formula is, of itself, valid. Therefore, if the rituals, liturgical books, or established customs of a church or ecclesial community prescribe either of these ways of baptism, the sacrament is to be considered valid unless there are serious reasons for doubting that the minister has observed the regulations of his/her own community or church.” (DE 95.a) You can read more about this in the [Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism](#). These communities are not bound by Catholic Canon law or liturgical norms.

As for your concerns stemming from [Acts 19:1-7](#) and [Canon 869.2](#) neither this passage of scripture or the Canon law should be a cause for concern. In Acts 19 Paul was addressing the fact that the disciples he encountered had never actually been baptized. John’s baptism was not capable of infusing someone with sanctifying grace. As for Canon 869.2 it seems as if both you and the minister of Baptism had the intention of Baptizing you according to the norms of that community and DE 95.a declares that even when the understanding of Baptism may be different than the Catholic understanding as long as the form and matter are the appropriate the Baptism is valid. If this was not the case the Catholic Church would have to reject a large portion of protestant Baptisms as many of those ecclesial communities consider Baptism no more than a symbol of the commitment to faith in Christ.

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: Hello, This question(s) might be too long; if so, I apologize. I am re-reading the New Testament ( Saint Joseph Edition of The New American Bible) and looking at the footnotes. Reading Matthew, I have noticed a questionable, if not problematic, note. In 16, 21-23, talking about the first prediction of the passion and the following later predictions, it states, "Neither this nor the two last passion predictions (Mt 17, 22-23; 20, 17-19) can be taken as sayings that, as they stand, go back to Jesus himself. However, it is probable that he foresaw that his mission could entail suffering and perhaps death, but was confident that he would ultimately be vindicated by God." 1) Why wouldn't these be the words of Jesus? If they are not the sayings of Jesus, how can we distinguish what was said by Jesus and what wasn't? Doesn't this take away from the word of God? 2) If we believe Jesus is fully man and God, how could he not have foreseen his death? If Jesus did not know that his suffering and death were coming, why did he say, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. (John 19:30) Again, I apologize if this is too long, and I could be wrong about my understanding and interpretation of the text, which is definitely a possibility. Thank you for your time and consideration. Have a Blessed Day, Dustin LeDoux.**

A: Thanks for your question. It is one that many have so you are not alone in your struggle to reconcile the notes found in many Bibles with Church teaching. Most assume that any Bible approved for use by the Catholic Church would include notes that have been verified to be aligned with orthodox Church teaching. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

There are a number of Bible translations that have been approved by the Catholic Church. However, in most cases, the publishers of Bible is free to use append their own notes to the approved scriptural translation. One exception to this is the NAB/NABRE where publishers are required to use the same notes when they use that translation. That said, this does not indicate that these notes are formally approved by the Church or free from having heterodox views expressed through the notes.

There are two great articles available at [Catholic Answers](#) that speak directly to this problem. Rather than “rebuild the wheel” I would like to reference these great resources. The first article is found [HERE](#) and provides an overview of the various Bible translations, the two prime methods of translation, and offers an assessment on the quality of the notes. The second article (actually a transcript of a podcast) found [HERE](#) specifically looks at some of the questionable notes found in the NAB. It specifically addresses your question about the note associated with Matthew 16:21-23. I think you will find both of these articles enlightening.

Trent Horn, the host on the referenced podcast makes a really important point regarding the NAB note referencing Matthew 16:21-23 stating, “Well, this is just modernist form criticism being placed into the text, oftentimes because of an anti-supernatural bias. You’ve got a lot of people who do biblical scholarship, who aren’t even Christian or they’re not believers, or they don’t believe in miracles. Look at Bart Ehrman. He’s the world’s leading scholar on textual criticism of the New Testament. He’s an agnostic.” Trent goes on to state, “This turns Jesus into someone like Jesus in many modern film adaptations of the gospel, not good ones, like The Chosen. But, in modern films where Jesus is portrayed as a human being who doesn’t really understand his mission or what God wants from him. But, that’s not true. We believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man. That means that Jesus fully understood the divine mission that he was sent for. It’s not just probable that Jesus knew that he would suffer and die for us. It’s necessary. It’s definite because he’s God.”

I hope you find both these references useful. I would recommend following the advice of the first article when it says, “If you wish to have the best traditional, orthodox study notes, the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible is hard to beat. The Didache Bible is a close second. Both feature the top-notch RSV translation and their notes are generally faithful to Church tradition.” I know that it is disturbing to discover that an approved Bible could mislead one in terms of our faith. I hope that now that you are aware of this problem, you can help share the information with others to help them avoid some of the same confusion and concern that you had to confront due to poor and heterodox Bible study notes

I hope that helps. Please write again any time.

**Q: I am returning catholic. I did all my confessions going to mass every Sunday. We're taking a deep holy communion. Since I was gone for so long I have a question. My understanding to pour count means to you universal. What does universal mean? Does that mean? All the mass every word in the world. And every country and every continent the priests is saying the same words. I just don't understand what that word actually means.**

A: Thanks for writing and welcome home to the Catholic Church. I am not quite sure I am understanding your full question as it appears there are some typos in there that are making it difficult to interpret. That said, I am going to take a crack at answering the, “What does universal mean?” question.

Your assumption is correct to a large extent. Wherever a [Latin Rite](#) (there are multiple rites in the Catholic Church – Latin rite is the largest) [Catholic Mass](#) is celebrated the celebrant (priest) is leveraging the same rubrics (instructions) and words to do so. At the same time, the prayers and

readings for the day would be the same as prescribed in the [Lectionary](#) (used by the lectors at Mass) and [Roman Missal](#) (used by the Celebrant at Mass).

While the language may be different all translations were made from an approved Latin text. As long as the translation was sound the words have the same meaning. That is an example of how the church is both One and [Catholic](#) (which means universal). It is a beautiful thing that no matter where you attend Mass and no matter what language is being used, a Catholic can actively participate in that Mass and encounter God through the assembly, the Celebrant, the Word of God proclaimed and the real presence in the Eucharist.

I hope that helps. If you want to clarify the question and write back please feel free to do so.

**Q: Hi, I've asked questions similar to this before but I'm afraid this may be a different answer altogether. I am familiar with cooperation with evil and various levels of permissibility, but I have shares of companies (coincidentally both apple and tesla), and they either pay for travel to get abortions for their employees, or the procedure itself (it's ambiguous if the latter is the case). A bioethicist said if they pay for the procedure itself, it's probably not moral to hold them (from the National Catholic Bioethics center). Can you help in this area? <https://fortune.com/2022/07/12/faith-based-investors-companies-abortion-travel-costs/> <https://www.axios.com/2022/05/05/abortion-travel-benefit-uber-apple-amazon-lyft>**

A: Thanks for the question. It's a tough one that is open to interpretation as there is not universal agreement on what constitutes either material cooperation with evil and what degrees of material cooperation can be tolerated. While formal cooperation with evil is always wrong, the Church does not have official, magisterial teachings that address whether your investments would be the type of material cooperation that would be problematic. This leaves us with trying to come up with the best possible answer by applying the principles of Catholic moral theology (see the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) - [CCC 1750-1756](#)).

I put a lot of faith in the judgement of the [National Catholic Bioethics Center](#) in this arena as they are a well respected source that is relied on both in this country and abroad. I also respect the approach used by Jimmy Akin of [Catholic Answers](#) who has put together an article on this topic that you can find [HERE](#) that addresses your specific question head on. In that article Jimmy makes a couple of points that can provide some guardrails for you when addressing investing in a company formally engaged in an evil act:

- 1) "A bit of research on the companies you're dealing with can help, but because your cooperation with any bad activity they're up to is probably material (and minimal), extensive investigation is not required."
- 2) "There are differences between investing and buying commodities such as food. One is that food is an absolute necessity of life, while investing is not. People don't have the option not to eat, but they do have the option not to invest. The decision to invest thus has a degree of voluntariness that food buying doesn't have, giving it extra moral weight. That weight should not be overestimated, though. Investing is a way of making money, just as having a job is, and people need money. The question is: How much money do you need?"

- 3) “Investing in stocks is also different from buying food in that one gains a share of ownership in the companies one invests in and thus a say in how they are run. That say may be minimal, but as long as one uses what voice he has in a moral fashion, he is acting responsibly.”

I wish I could give you something a little more definitive. This is one of those cases where you are obligated to be as informed as possible (about both Catholic moral teaching and the companies you invest in) and then allow your conscience to drive your ultimate decision.

I hope that helps clear some things up for you.

**Q: Looking at 1 Kings 18:40, who is Balaal? And why does Elijah have them slaughtered in the Kishon valley?**

A: That is a great question. it's one of those examples of what are frequently called “Hard Sayings” – a passage from Sacred Scripture that seems to be encouraging, or at least condoning, significant evil.

The scene that we are talking about is during the reign of King Ahab ([1 Kings 18:20-40](#)). During this period of Israel’s history some of the Israelites (including Ahab through his wife Jezebel) had fallen in the worship of the false god [Baal](#) (sometimes translated as Balaal). While there were many civilizations that worshipped a god of this name they were not all the same. In this case it was believed that Baal could help with fruitful crops and as an agrarian culture the Israelites were susceptible to belief in such a god. The King has called the Israelites to Mt. Carmel so there could be a “showdown” between the great prophet of the one true God – Elijah – and the hundreds of prophets supported by Ahab that claimed to be speaking for Baal. Elijah calls upon the true God by defeating the prophets of Baal handily in the “contest” demonstrating God’s power and the feebleness of the worship of the false god Baal. God is working through Elijah to bring his chosen people back to Him through this incident.

Elijah’s action at the end of this passage – the killing of the false prophets of the false god Baal – needs to be understood in light of Elijah’s zeal for the Lord and the mentality of the time. The Mosaic law prescribed exactly such treatment of prophets of pagan divinities in order to safeguard the religious purity of the chosen people (see [Deuteronomy 13:13-19](#)). Most of the Mosaic purity and dietary laws were intended to keep the chosen people from being drawn away from the love of God by assimilating the practices of their pagan neighbors. God was “training” the chosen people to become the sons and daughters they were intended to be. However, like all children they needed some pretty strict guidelines to keep the safe while they grew and matured.

There is a great book by Trent Horn of Catholic Answers entitled, *Hard Sayings*, that deals with a number of difficulties (e.g., apparent contradictions, God’s apparent acceptance of evil, etc...) people encounter with the Biblical text. It provides a sound framework for understanding these difficult elements of Sacred Scripture by identifying the tools needed to properly interpret them.

I hope that helps!



## Weeks of 03/19 & 03/26

**Q: In our Gospel reading today, what did Thomas mean when he said "Let us also go to die with him."?**

A: Thanks for your question. The readings can be difficult to understand at times because you are hearing only a short passage proclaimed during Mass. In this case, even though the Gospel passage was a longer one ([John 11:1-45](#)) if you were not reading it in context of the previous passages/events you could be confused.

In this particular case you need to look back to the passages that precede Sunday's Gospel ([John 10:31-39](#)) where we find that Jesus had just left Jerusalem and crossed to the other side of the Jordan because the Jewish religious authorities had tried to arrest and kill him after accusing him of blasphemy. This is why just a few verses later after Jesus announced that He was going to return to Judea (the region where Jerusalem is located) in [John 11:7](#) we find that, "The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?'" ([John 11:8](#))

When Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him," ([John 11:16](#)) he is urging the other disciples to return to Judea with Jesus while assuming that it is likely that both Jesus' life and theirs will be threatened.

I hope that helps clear some things up for you.

**Q: A protestant asked me about not following tradition of men... "Why limit it to Jewish customs of the Pharisees?" Can Catholic traditions be ever called traditions of men? What's the difference between sacred tradition and traditions of men?**

A: Great question. This comes up A LOT! First off, we agree 100% with our separated Protestant brothers and sisters regarding adhering to the traditions of men. We believe Jesus was quite clear when He said, "You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. And he said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!'" ([Mark 7:8-9](#)) We believe that there is nothing that can override, amend, or add to the Word of God as received in divine revelation.

However, we believe that the Word of God was handed on to us through both the divinely inspired written Word (Sacred Scripture) and orally directly by Jesus to his Apostles. We find the basis for this in Sacred Scripture where Saint Paul tells the Thessalonians, "...stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." ([2 Thessalonians 2:15](#)) We see this same teaching from Saint Paul in [1 Corinthians 11:2](#), [2 Thessalonians 3:6](#), [2 Timothy 1:13](#), [2 Timothy 2:2](#), etc....

What our separated Protestant brothers and sisters often forget is that the New Testament was not written for decades after Christ's resurrection, so all the early Christians were taught orally through the **Traditional oral teachings** handed on from Jesus to His Apostles. They also failed to recognize the truth in [John 21:25](#) when the evangelist writes, "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

This is why Catholics (and all Christians for the first 1500 years of Christianity) were not believers in the doctrine of Sola Scriptura (Bible Alone) as the only source of Divine revelation. We 100% reject the idea that anything outside of Divine Revelation should be adhered to as dogma or infallible Doctrine, but we also recognize that Jesus handed on (Divinely revealed) many things that are not captured in Sacred Scripture and that He empowered the Apostles to pass that on under the guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit.

Within the Church we recognize two types of tradition – Holy Tradition (oral teachings of Jesus passed on to the Apostles) and other Church traditions / practices that the Church has developed to help the faithful adhere to the faith. Those “lower case” traditions should never be held in the same light as oral Tradition (“Capital T” Tradition) entrusted by Jesus to His Apostles and can in no way conflict with what has been divinely revealed.

I hope that helps.

**Q: Regarding Godfather: nowadays, how do we should face the responsibility to baptize someone? A long time ago, there was close participation between the “new life” person and the Godfather and Godmother but lately is very different. Thank you!!**

A: Thanks for the question. You have identified a sad, but often true, reality that parents invite people to serve as godparents to their children who are either not properly prepared or not committed to fulfilling the requirements of that role. That said, the Church teaching on that role has not changed. What has changed is the understanding of the importance of role on the part of parents and individuals that have agreed to serve as Godparents.

Both the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) and the [Code of Canon Law](#) speak extensively about what is required from both parents (in the case of infant or childhood baptism) and sponsors/godparents for Baptism. Canon 851 requires that parents, “...are to be instructed properly on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it.” This would include the understanding of what is expected when inviting someone to be your child’s Godparent. Canon 872 defines that the sponsor/godparent must be prepared to, “...help the baptized person lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfil faithfully the obligations inherent in it.” Canon 874 defines the four requirements for one to serve as a sponsor/godparent: 1) Must be 16 years of age, 2) Must be a fully initiated Catholic who is actively practicing the faith, 3) must not be bound by any canonical penalty, and 4) must not be the mother or father of the individual. You can read more about the Church’s teaching on Baptism in paragraphs [CCC 1213-1284](#) of the Catechism.

Unfortunately, a variety of factors (poor catechesis, availability of Church resources, etc...) have led to the present situation where very often those selected to be godparents simply cannot or chose not to fulfill the role. In most U.S. dioceses (If not all) both parents and sponsors/godparents are required to take a class (or series of classes) in preparation for a child’s Baptism to help them fully understand the meaning of the sacraments and the responsibility for supporting the child’s faith development they are committing to. This is clearly not as consistently effective as we would all like it to be.

The bottom line for you is that Church teaching on this subject has not changed. It is the responsibility of all of us to help others understand that teaching as members of Christ's body. I hope this response gives you the ability to participate in that educational process for those in your life / community.

**Q: My question is about the First Saturday devotion. Because of my work schedule, it's not possible for me to attend mass on Saturday morning. From what I have read, one of the requirements is to receive communion but it doesn't say that the requirement is to attend mass. (Although, there's really no other way for me to receive communion. ) My question is, if I receive communion at the Saturday evening vigil mass, does that fulfill the First Saturday requirement to receive communion? I have been doing everything else for the devotion. I'm just unsure as to whether or not receiving communion at the vigil mass counts for the First Saturday devotion.**

A: Thanks for that question. There is an excellent article on Catholic.com by Father Charles Gronden that explains the requirements for the first Saturday devotion in detail. You can find that article [HERE](#). The requirement relative to worthy reception of communion is, "Reception of Holy Communion must take place within twenty-four hours of the first Saturday. The reception of Communion need not be part of a Mass." Therefore, you are indeed meeting the requirements of the devotion by receiving communion at the Vigil Mass on Saturday evening.

I hope this helps.

**Q: I have a question regarding the origin of evil. My understanding is that sin, death, and evil originated at the fall of man. Why did they choose to sin? We could say they were tempted by the serpent/Satan. And why would Satan tempt them and turn away from God? We could say he was prideful. But why was he prideful? He didn't have original sin or concupiscence. How do we avoid saying God created him with pride or created him with a propensity to sin? Therefore, saying God created evil. If he had sufficient knowledge of God and His goodness, why would he ever have turned against him unless he had a God given propensity to pride and sin built into him. Wouldn't the saints in heaven be in a similar place, knowing Gods goodness without original sin. They wouldn't randomly generate pride or sin in that state. I have been looking for an answer for a long time and haven't found much to be helpful.**

A: Thanks for the question. It's a good one. It is a variant of the problem of evil that people have struggled with for millennia.

Let's start with some basics. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us, "God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions. God willed that man should be 'left in the hand of his own counsel,' so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him. Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts." [\(CCC 1730\)](#) Moral evil perpetrated by Man occur not because God creates or will it, but because He permits it as a result making us in His "image and likeness" [\(Genesis 1:26\)](#) endowed with intellect (the ability to reason) and free will. "As long as freedom has not bound itself definitively to its ultimate good which is God, there is the possibility of choosing between good and evil." [\(CCC 1732\)](#)

Angels, were created like men, with free will so they could choose to love or reject God. “Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus, has moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it. For almighty God ..., because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself. [\(CCC 311\)](#) You can read more about the fall of angels in [CCC 391-393](#).

With those basics out of the way let’s move on to your question. Since Angels were created with free will Satan and the other fallen angels could choose against God. As this [brief article](#) by Tim Staples concisely states, “...the angels would have been created in what—what we say in Latin, right, ‘in statu viae’, ‘in a state of journeying.’ They were in a place of testing.” When angels became aware of God’s plan to bring man – a clearly lower creature – into full communion with Him, some fell victim to pride and chose against God. The fallen angels simply could not accept this elevation of man and since they did not yet have the [beatific vision](#) they could choose against God. Those that chose God were given the beatific vision. Those that chose against God were damned to eternal separation from Him. Where we are given a lifetime to make that choice as material creatures living in time, the angels were given this choice at their creation. However, like the angels, once we die and move on from the material realm our choice is fixed. If we choose God, we will have the beatific vision and be unable to choose against Him. If we choose against God, we will be separated from Him for eternity (what those who make that choice want and, once their will is fixed at death, the only thing they can accept).

So Satan did not have “sufficient knowledge of God and His goodness.” That would have robbed the angels of the dignity of free will and the choice to love. Hence, Satan chose against God because he could. Once he made that choice his hate for man was also manifest. Satan hated God and his other creatures, especially man. As a result, Satan wants nothing more than to see us choose against God as well. Satan tempted man and we failed our test and hence original sin was introduced (see [CCC 403](#) and [CCC 407](#) for more). Christ came to give us the pathway to redemption. Those that persevere in faith in this life and choose God until death are given the beatific vision as Saints in heaven. With the beatific vision in place the Saints can not choose against God as they would have “sufficient knowledge of God and His goodness.”

What God gave both angels and man through the gift of free will is the ability to love. Without that gift we would be little more than slaves or puppets. God gave us that gift knowing full well we could choose to reject Him so that we could also choose to freely return the love He has for us.

I hope that helps clear some things up for you.

Week of 03/12/23

**Q: Why is it that the more you get closer to God, the more you suffer?**

A: I am sorry that your suffering has increased as you have progressed on your faith journey. It is certainly not a direct result of the progress you are making in building a deeper relationship with God. It could be seen as an attempt of the evil one to derail that progress or simply a matter of the reality that we live in a broken world.

Suffering is not from God. God permits evil but only because He is able to bring a greater good out of the suffering that we experience in this life (see problem of evil [CCC 309-314](#)). It is difficult for us to see how this could be so, but if we stop and contemplate all of the good that has come from Jesus' passion and death, you can begin to understand how God can turn even the greatest evil into the greatest good (either in this life or the next).

Jesus did not promise that our lives would be easy. As a matter of fact, Jesus tells us that, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) That said, Jesus also promised us that, "...I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). When we experience suffering in our lives that is a time to reach for Jesus and join our suffering to His. When I experience this type of suffering, I imagine myself carrying the cross and Jesus stepping in to lighten the load by carrying it with me. As Jesus told us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Pray for the grace of fortitude and perseverance. Ask God to relieve you of this suffering or give you the strength you need to endure it and join it to His. Prayer is a powerful means of overcoming those events in our life that cause suffering or lead us away from God. Active participation in the Liturgy and the Sacraments is even more powerful as they are the ordinary means of accessing God's grace and encountering God directly.

I will be praying for an end to your suffering, and I encourage you to ask others to do the same!

**Q: Is there scriptural evidence for the Marian Dogmas of bodily assumption and immaculate conception? Is Isaiah 66:7 about Mary or Zion?**

A: The direct support for the Assumption comes from [Revelation 11:19-12:1](#) where John has the vision of the ark of the covenant and the "woman" in heaven. Mary is the new ark having carried the Word of God, True Bread from Heaven and our True High Priest (Jesus is all three) just as the ark carried the Word of God (Ten Commandments), Bread from Heaven (Manna) and The symbol of the High Priest (Aaron's staff). It is clear that the woman giving birth to the savior is Mary and while John has a vision of other souls in heaven it is only the woman that is described as having bodily form supporting Mary's bodily assumption. This is a Church teaching that was being relayed by Church fathers in the second century. It is supported by the precedent found in [Genesis 5:24](#) (Enoch being assumed) and [2 Kings 2:11](#) (Elijah being assumed).

The support for the Immaculate conception is voluminous and direct. Starting with [Genesis 3:15](#) (the Protoevangelium) – the prophecy of the "woman" who will bear the messiah, but then explicitly cited in the infancy narratives found in [Luke 1:28](#) (full of grace = devoid of sin), [Luke 1:30](#) (favor with God), and [Luke 1:37](#) (for God nothing is impossible). Some will point to [Romans 3:23](#) (all have sinned) as evidence against this teaching, but those people fail to recognize that

Paul is quoting [Psalm 14](#) here where “all” has explicit exceptions. Finally in Mary’s Magnificat we find, “and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” (Luke 1:47–49). She was “saved” (freed from sin) before Jesus was born (through the retroactive power of Christ’s Passion and Death)!

**Q: The Church says “for richer or poorer...till death do us part...” about marriage. It seems divorce is a no. However, does the case make exceptions in cases of adultery, domestic violence or sexual abuse?**

A: The Church takes the Word of God seriously when Jesus says, “‘Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning 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’? So, they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matthew 19:4-6) The Church does not recognize any instance where a valid marriage can be ended through Divorce.

That said, the Church does recognize that not all marriages are valid as they were not entered into freely, with full knowledge, with the intention of giving oneself totally and a commitment to a lifetime of faithfulness. As a result, the Church does allow individuals to petition to have their conditions at the time their marriage was entered into to determine if the conditions for a valid marriage were met. For example, if a man was unfaithful to his fiancé prior to their marriage and during their marriage one could conclude that he had no intention of being faithful when he vowed to do so. Evidence could be presented to a diocesan tribunal that would demonstrate this and a declaration of nullity could be issued declaring that the marriage never, in fact, occurred.

If a marriage was valid at the point it was entered into and later one of the spouses became unfaithful or abusive the Church would rely on God’s word and providence and continue to recognize that validity and lifelong nature of the marital bond. The Church would encourage the couple to seek help in overcoming these incredibly difficult challenges. However, the Church, in extreme circumstances may actually recommend civil divorce for the physical and economic protection of one or both of the spouses with the understanding that in the eyes of God they remain married and hence are not free to marry others.

**Q: Being diagnosed with depression and post traumatic stress due to childhood trauma...I see a psychiatrist/take anti-depressant medication for anxiety. I tried to get off these medications and I got very mentally unstable. I have trauma, I have brain synapse issues...praying over and over for the intrusive thoughts (to end) that still come to this day. I want to not need these medicines, these doctors, this stigma...the issues continue to be very painful and so much of my life has been so sad, so lost and lonely. A day ago I thought about why suicide is an unforgiveable sin...because this selfish act is denying God, sweeping away faith, forgetting his Holy and everlasting presence. Is depression Real? Can we heal our trauma through prayers instead of pills?**

A: First off I want to say how sorry I am that you have been given such heavy crosses to bear. It is a mystery that will only be completely unveiled to us in heaven why some are asked to carry

such significant crosses while others seemingly have only small crosses to overcome. Jesus did not promise that our lives would be easy. As a matter of fact, Jesus tells us that, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) Many theologians have argued that those given the most significant crosses receive them because they have the strength to bear them as a means of helping those that could not bear such difficulty in life.

As for your questions, the scientific evidence and our human experience both tell us that depression is indeed a real, and sometimes debilitating illness. Prayer can help us bear this illness and, and if God's providence calls for it, be cured of it. Therefore, prayer is always a powerful tool for us to rely on. That said, God is the author of not just revelation but of all human knowledge. As a result, he can work through the medical professionals and the tools/drugs that have been created to assist them. There is no shame in leveraging the gifts God has given us through others and is medication is helpful in controlling and/or minimizing the impact of a medical condition we should thank God for its existence and take advantage of the relief it can provide through God's grace.

**Q: If you are in a committed relationship (fiancé) and the woman cannot have children anymore.... We are asked to live as siblings until we are married. For some, this might be years away...How do we as a couple continue to be free of the sinful act of sex before marriage even if the action of sex will never produce a baby?**

A: Whether or not one is physically able to have a child is not relevant to the Church's teaching that the only appropriate use of our sexual powers is within the boundaries of a valid marriage where both parties have entered into the marital covenant freely, with the intention of giving themselves fully (body and soul) to their spouse, in a lifetime commitment of fidelity, and an openness to the gift of children (if that is within God's providential plan). Sexual relations prior to the making of that commitment in front of God are morally wrong (see [CCC 2353](#) and [2360-2372](#)) as it is an act that is undertaken outside of that covenantal total self-giving.

The Church has specific teaching regarding the Gift of children within the marital bond that will help explain why the natural ability to give birth is not a consideration here (see [CCC 2373-2379](#)). Even if a couple is not able to physically conceive because of any of a number of disorders and/or age if they remain open to God acting miraculously in their life to overcome these natural obstacles that is what is required. There are countless cases where couples that have been told they are medically incapable of childbirth have become pregnant. God can do all things!

The key to living up to this teaching is to avoid the near occasion of sin that is present when a couple begins living together prior to marriage. This Church has always strongly discouraged this practice not only to safeguard one's moral purity, but because those that do live together prior to marriage actually face an increased likelihood of divorce in every year of marriage following the first year when compared to married couples that do not live together prior to marriage.

**Q: How can you write your true, honest story.... The one that you were created to live? Why would you be overbearing as a mother, why you really left a marriage and be sorrowful, be humble? Why do we do such things?**

A: If I am understanding the question correctly it really asking, "Why do we sin instead of living out our lives in accordance with God's will for us?" That is the age-old question that even saint Paul addresses regarding himself when he states, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." (Romans 7:15-20) The bottom line according to saint Paul is our broken nature and our free will.

We were made in God's image and likeness ([Genesis 1:26](#)) and hence we have the ability to reason and exercise our free will. This means we can choose God and the good and also choose to reject God and the good. However, as C.S. Lewis states, "Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having." Without this ability to choose against God we can not truly learn to love God or others.

We are all sinners and all do things we regret as a result. The good news is that God gave us the Liturgy and Sacrament to help heal, strengthen, transform and unify us (to Him and each other) so that we can come, through the acceptance of God's grace, closer and closer to the beloved sons and daughters of God we were destined to be. We can't do it alone and God did not leave us alone. We need to approach God in humility and with contrition, receive His grace and get "back on the horse" when we fail. If we work on growing closer to God and opening ourselves fully to His grace we will see our ability to avoid the "sin that dwells within us."

**Q: When reading the Old Testament, I sometimes wonder whether the particular behaviour of the characters described was moral. Was Gideon's revenge or rebellion against Abimelech moral? Or actions of Danites in Laish? Or Judges 21:10? Or 1 Mch 2:32-38? What about 1 Mch 6:43-46? And 1 Mch 9:37-41?**

**In the Epistle to the Hebrews, among the "heroes of faith" Samson is mentioned, whose actions (including the last one just before his death) do not sound moral. How to explain this?**

**Were the Essenes right to withdraw from Jonathan?**

**The Holy Inquisition is said to have burned a number of people at the stake. Was this immoral?**

**Is it OK to read apocryphas?**

A: These are all good questions. The majority of them have to do with addressing the apparently immoral actions that we find primarily in the Old Testament that, if not commanded directly by God, were at least accepted by Him. I will address those questions as one group at the end of this response. I want to start with your last three questions that are independent of that larger question.



1. Is it OK to read the apocryphas?
  - a. Of course. With the caveat that you understand they are not divinely inspired and, while many have historical value, anything that you find in them that conflicts with Church teaching should be understood to be false.
  - b. That said, if your faith or understanding of Church teaching is not strong, you may want to avoid these texts in order to minimize the possibility of being misled.
2. The Holy Inquisition is said to have burned a number of people at the stake. Was this immoral?
  - a. I would like to start by suggesting that you read a good book that provides an accurate view of what the inquisitions (there not one large inquisition) were and what their main driver was. There are MANY misconceptions regarding the Church's role in inquisitions (they were more often than not politically driven).
  - b. Steve Weidenkopf's book, *Timeless: A History of the Catholic Church* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2018) has several excellent sections covering both the Spanish and Roman inquisitions and is an excellent source for objective Church history.
  - c. This dialog between Trent Horn and Christopher Check is also a useful tool for better understanding the motivations and realities of the inquisitions - <https://www.catholic.com/audio/cot/actually-everybody-expects-the-spanish-inquisition>
  - d. All that said, it is clear that burning people at the stake is immoral. We understand this clearly today as we believe that in order for an act to be moral the object, end and circumstances must all be good (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC 1750-1756), but that understanding was not always as clear and for many today still remains unclear.
3. Were the Essenes right to withdraw from Jerusalem?
  - a. This is one of the theories regarding the formation of the Essene sect, their separation from the Temple, and movement out of Jerusalem and into the area around the Dead Sea. It is one of many theories however so offering an opinion on its "rightness" is not something I would want to speculate on.

Now for the bigger question about what appear to be clearly immoral actions committed by God's chosen people or their divinely designated leaders; often with what appears to be a divine mandate (e.g., God telling the Hebrew people to wipe out the people of the promised land so they can take it for themselves). These passages trouble many and have led some to speculate that there is a "Good God" and a "Bad God" depicted in Sacred Scripture. We know there is only one God and that He is all good, all knowing and all powerful so it becomes a question of how we can reconcile these actions/directives with that understanding.

I will approach the answer using Sampson (since you mentioned him prominently) but the same principles apply in the other events you question. Whether the stories regarding Sampson are to be taken literally or not at the very least they seem to promote immoral acts (e.g., Judges 14:19 where Sampson kills 30 innocent people). We need to read these passages with an understanding of the context. Generally speaking, the people of the world at that time were extremely violent and barbaric. Mankind had not yet developed civilly, emotionally, and morally and hence you could consider humanity as little more than children in men's bodies during most

of revelation history. We had much to learn and God in his patience worked with us to gradually train us to be who we are meant to be – His beloved Sons and Daughters. While we were undergoing this training God allowed us to “act as violent children” while we steadily grew and matured. A father needs great patience when raising his children.

Samson’s exploits were certainly violent and often sexually immoral, but when read in their proper context, what we find is the actions of an imperfect man that God used to strike at the enemies of his people (the Philistines). As St. Augustine says, “The Spirit of the Lord is at work in those who do good and those who do evil, in those that are aware and those who are unaware and what he knows and does.” Sampson was certainly a damaged hero but a hero nonetheless – a generally good person with significant character flaws. God has a history of using the flawed to achieve his ends. If God could only use the perfect, He would have a very limited number of choices through which to work (Himself). It’s a lesson for all of us – we are all flawed but that does not mean we cannot achieve great things for God.

Finally, we must remember that God is the author of life. Our lives here on earth are a gift that we do not deserve and have no right to. God is able to give us as much or as little of this gift as He deems is necessary for our good. God can also define how and when that gift will end, knowing that what we have the opportunity to experience in eternity is so much greater than anything we can experience here. At the same time, when we read things like the account of God’s demanding the utter destruction of the Canaanites (Joshua 6) we must remember that these were the same people that God told Abraham He would provide with 400 years in which to repent while the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt. (Genesis 15:13-14). The Canaanites were worshippers of false Gods, tolerated a variety of sexual sins (incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, etc...) and engaged in child sacrifice. God gave them time to mature and come to the good, but they did not. As the author of life, God was deciding they had wasted his gift long enough and was withdrawing it and using the Hebrew people to exact His justice.

When viewing these “tough” passages from a modern viewpoint that does not recognize God as the author of life, they can seem to be barbaric at best and evidence of pure evil at worst. When viewed in context of God gradually working with us as we matured and grew, using flawed humans to gradually bend us to his will (which is always for our good); one comes to a very different understanding of these passages. I would recommend two good resources for you to explore this further: 1) *Light On The Dark Passages of Scripture*, by Mark Giszczak (Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), and 2) *Hard Sayings*, by Trent Horn (Catholic Answer Press, 2016). Both explore these and other related topics in detail and I am sure they will provide much more clarity than I can in a short response.

**Q: My six-year-old asks, "Why did God make germs?" He thinks that because they make us sick, that the devil made them.**

A: Thanks for that question. It's great that your six-year-old is even considering such things. Let's start with the basic premise that God created everything and everything He created was good. We see this in both the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Genesis 1:1-30; CCC 299, CCC 339) This would include all the microscopic creatures like those classified as germs. The

devil was one of God's creation's (an Angel) and, as such, even he was created good. Unfortunately, just as our first parents (Adam and Eve) chose against God (Genesis 3:1-7) the devil made a similar choice and rebelled against the good (CCC 391). That said, only God has the power to create and hence God did indeed create germs.

The group of creatures commonly called germs consist for four broad groups: 1) Bacteria (say: bak-TEER-ee-uh), 2) Viruses (say: VY-rus-iz), 3) Fungi (say: FUN-guy), and 4) Protozoa (say: pro-toh-ZOH-uh). (see this link for more detail) All germs either live inside or on other living things (their hosts) and are dependent upon those things to supply the nutrients they need. While multiplication and flourishing of germs in/on one's body can result in irritations, infections, and disease not all germs are bad for you. For example, there are some bacteria that our bodies depend on to keep our bodies in balance, process the nutrients we need to remain healthy, and help us fight disease. Without them we simply could not live. God created them to be helpers to their hosts.

Unfortunately, when our first parents rebelled against God that not only damaged the nature of our first parents introducing sin and death, but damaged the entire natural order. In the sin of our first parents man's, "Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man." (CCC 400) As a result, the delicate balance that needs to be in place for us to live in harmony with germs was damaged created the out-of-balance (disordered) conditions that allow germs to become dangerous for us.

The good news is God promised a savior – Jesus Christ (See Genesis 3:15) - and the return of the return of the original harmony between man and nature through that savior (Isaiah 11:1-9) when He returns at the end of time. Our job is to "hasten the day" (2 Peter 3:1-12) by working to build God's kingdom on earth by sharing the Gospel message and bringing more people into the Body of Christ. Meanwhile, God has helped scientists not only create defenses for us against germs that can harm us, but even helped us learn how to use those germs to create medicines that help us in other way. This is a clear indication that God can create a good out of any evil (see problem of evil CCC 309-314).

I hope that helps you with your six-year-old. You should be proud that he is having these types of thoughts and I commend you for seeking an answer to help satisfy his curiosity.

**Q: I am confused about how to understand Rom 5:13, in conjunction with Rom 3:20. The former says, "for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law," while the latter says, "for through the law comes consciousness of sin." Does "up to the time of the law" mean even before the law was given, and is this law the Mosaic law or does Paul have another law in mind? And what is this sin then if it was in the world even before anyone, presumably beginning with Adam and Eve, was even conscious of it? And what does it mean for sin to not be accounted? I am aware that for something to be considered (accounted???) mortal sin, three conditions must be met: grave matter, full knowledge (consciousness of it being sin???), and full consent. Is mortal sin then different from the sin mentioned in these verses from Romans? Lately I have been really grappling with trying to understand sin and death. I am wondering if these words have multiple meanings which may get lost in translation from Hebrew/Greek/Latin to English, since**

**in many ways the English language is impoverished. I read somewhere that the word sin is related etymologically to the idea of being. I am not sure if it is correct to say that plants, animals, and humans all have being, but if it is, it would seem that only humans have awareness or knowledge of their being, which is why when a Venus fly trap eats a fly or when a cheetah kills a gazelle, we don't charge them with the sin of murder for the death of another living creature.**

A: Thanks for the question. The good news is that your instincts have brought you to a point of answering most of your question yourself in a way that would agree with two of my Favorite contemporary theologians / scripture scholars – Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

You are correct in your recognition that the law that Paul is speaking of is the Mosaic law. In the passage that contains Romans 3:20, Paul is, amongst other things, making it clear that, "...the law of Moses is not an instrument of justification, a means of acquiring the saving righteousness of God." (Hahn, Scott and Mitch, Curtis; Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Romans; Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI; pg. 43) Rather, Paul is stating that the law was given to the chosen people, "...to prepare the way for salvation by imparting a consciousness of sin." (Hahn, Scott and Mitch, Curtis; Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Romans; Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI; pg. 43) From the time of Adam to the handing on of the Mosaic law people were sinning against the natural law (the common moral compass), but could not be held fully culpable as there were no explicit, God given, laws promulgated.

With the introduction of the Mosaic law that knowledge was imparted and culpability for sin increased. Once again you are heading down the right path as in the absence of the law one of the conditions for a sin to be deadly was not in place – full knowledge. With the promulgation of the law that condition was now met and the same evil acts could rise to point of separating one from God. Prior to the promulgation of the over 600 precepts in the Torah there was no violation of a divinely revealed commandment other than the precept given in Genesis 2:16-17.

When we talk about the passage that contains Romans 5:13 is actually used as the prime justification for the doctrine of original sin. Specifically, Romans 5:12 was relied upon heavily and, "...when the Council of Trent define the doctrine of original sin in the sixteenth century, it gave particular attention to this passage." (Hahn, Scott and Mitch, Curtis; Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Romans; Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI; pg. 84) When Paul writes, "...for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law," (Romans 5:13) it does not mean, "...that God took no notice of human rebellion in the centuries between Adam (and the introduction of sin) and Moses...(but) the generations between Adam and Moses were less culpable for their sins." (Hahn, Scott and Mitch, Curtis; Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Romans; Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI; pg. 84)

I hope that helps confirm your thinking relative to the interplay of those two verses. As for why, "...when a Venus fly trap eats a fly or when a cheetah kills a gazelle, we don't charge them with the sin of murder for the death of another living creature," the answer lies in the fact that plants and animals are not created in God's image and likeness (possessing intellect and will embodied in a rational soul – Genesis 1:26). Plants and animals are acting out of embedded and learned instinct for survival of their species and cannot be held accountable for their nature.

Once again, I think you were pretty much on point with your thinking across the board. Being in agreement with Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch put you in pretty good exegetical company.

**Q: So I just watched the Trent Horn vs. Gavin Ortlund sola scriptura debate and I've got a related question. First off, Trent did great as always. There was, however, a point made by Ortlund that I don't think he was able to get to during the debate. Ortlund said something to the effect that binding authoritative magisterial teaching would essentially be useless because the magisterial teaching itself could be interpreted in various ways by different individuals. He made reference to liberal and conservative Catholics on that matter. That's similar to when we Catholics say that under the doctrine of sola scriptura, anyone can interpret the Bible in any way they please. How would you respond to this objection?**

A: That is an excellent question. I can see how one could make this analogy, but like all analogies it fails to paint an accurate picture of the reality of the thing it seeks to describe. While Mr. Ortlund rightly points out that there are disagreements in the interpretation of Magisterial teachings amongst Catholics, we see those same disagreements in any community that is governed by law. This does not invalidate either the laws or the law making authority. The key is making sure that there is an ultimate authoritative means of resolving these disputes to prevent descension into chaos. Christ provided this structure when he commissioned Peter as the first Pope (Matthew 16:18-19), handing him both the Keys to Christ's kingdom on earth (in His absence) and the power to "bind and loose" – create, interpret and enforce laws. Christ provided a second level of authority to work with the Pope when he gave the Apostles the ability to share in the "binding and loosing" authority just a week later as described in Matthew 18:18.

By establishing this hierarchy, and providing the Holy Spirit as its guide; a mechanism was established for accurately interpreting the faith and binding the faithful to their interpretation. Jesus promised the Apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them and enable them to remember everything He taught them (John 14:15-17, 25-26). By doing so, Jesus was ensuring there would be a means of accurately resolving interpretive disputes regarding faith and morals. As the teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium (Pope and Bishops in communion with him) authentically interprets the Word of God as defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 85-86).

Ultimately, when disagreements arise regarding the meaning / interpretation of divine revelation, the Pope has the ability to definitely resolve it as, "The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith—he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals..." (CCC 491) "The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium," above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine 'for belief as being divinely revealed,' and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions 'must be adhered to with the obedience of faith.' This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself." (CCC 491)

When there is a disagreement on the part of the laity and/or clergy it is this same Magisterial authority that provides the clarity necessary that all Catholics are bound to assent to with the level of assent appropriate for the type of declaration being made (see the table below).

Level	Source	Type of Assent Required
<b>Dogma</b>	<b>God</b> (Scripture & Tradition)	<b>Assent of Theological Faith</b> - requires an act of the will, not merely an act of the intellect.
<b>Doctrine – Infallible</b>	Magisterium Acting Officially	<b>Firm and Definitive Assent</b> - He who adheres to the teaching of the Church, as to an infallible rule, assents to whatever the Church teaches; otherwise, if, ...he holds what he chooses to hold...no longer adheres to the teaching of the Church, but to his own will.
<b>Doctrine – Mutable</b>	Magisterium Acting Officially	<b>Religious Submission of Will and Intellect</b> - We submit to the authority that Christ established for His Church.
<b>Non-Doctrinal Statements</b>	Members of the Magisterium Acting As Individuals	<b>Received With Respect &amp; Gratitude BUT Does NOT Require Assent</b>
<b>Theological Opinions</b>	Clergy, Theologians / Catechists	<b>None Required</b>

Where the analogy truly fails is that where there is no ultimate authority sitting behind the interpretations of those professing a belief in Sola Scriptura, there is in the Catholic Church’s reliance on the Magisterium. As a result, while there is no means of resolving interpretive disputes of Sacred Scripture for those professing Sola Scriptura, the Magisterium serves as that authority in interpreting the Word of God delivered that has been handed on in both its written (Sacred Scripture) and oral (Holy Tradition) forms. It is this same Magisterium that has the ability – either the Pope acting alone (rare) or the Bishops in communion with then Pope – that resolves any disputes in interpretation of Magisterial disputes. We see this time and time again over the course of the last 2,000 years in the form of Ecumenical Councils acting to resolve interpretive disputes between members of the Magisterium.

## Week of 03/05/23

**Q: Does the Catholic Church prefer a monarchy type government more than a liberal democracy?**

A: The Church does not express a preference for the form of government that is adopted by nation states. That is a decision best left up to the citizens of that nation state ([CCC 1901](#)). The Church does recognize the need for secular authority ([CCC 1897-1898](#)) as well as the needs of citizens to be obedient to that authority ([CCC 1900](#)). The Church does state that a legitimate political authority is one that seeks the common good of its people and employs morally licit means to obtain it. ([CCC 1903](#))

## Week of 02/26/23

**Q: A friend of mine is Catholic, but I believe he has only been Baptized, nothing further. He says his family doesn’t go to Church. How can I effectively start and open dialog about the faith between the two of us without seeming like that is all I care about?**

A: That is an excellent question - thanks for asking it. As Catholics we are all tasked with promoting and defending the faith once we are fully initiated into the Church (Baptized, Confirmed and having received First holy Communion). It is wonderful that you care for this friend's spiritual well-being. To demonstrate true love for another is to care about the good of the other. To be concerned with, and work to help their eternal good is the highest form of love. As St. James tells us, "My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20)

You can start by asking a couple of questions about your friend's personal faith practices and interest in learning more about the faith. Find out what he does and does not believe and/or have interest in. If your friend is open to the discussion, and you verify he has not been confirmed and/or received his first Holy Communion, you can then address that by talking about the power of those Sacraments. If he has received his sacraments but does not practice, the best thing you could do is invite him to attend Mass with you. If he is not ready for that you can share some of the benefits of actively practicing the faith that you are experiencing in your life and see where that leads you.

You can also offer him some reading material that explains the basics of our faith (e.g. Father Mike's YouTube videos, Trent Horn's book, "Why We're Catholic", etc...). Often, when someone can explore on their own a bit, the conversation can be a little more fruitful. What you don't want to do is push hard – your friend must be led to faith by God's grace – or focus on the negatives (e.g. you are putting your soul in jeopardy). Focus on the positives of the full practice of the faith as a means of drawing closer to our living God. Your personal witness of joy will be the most effective tool you have.

**Q: Did God make dinosaurs?**

A: We believe God is the creator of all things. As CCC 338 tells us, "Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator. The world began when God's word drew it out of nothingness; all existent beings, all of nature, and all human history are rooted in this primordial event, the very genesis by which the world was constituted and time begun." The fossil record clearly documents the existence of Dinosaurs hence their existence must be due to the actions of God.

Concerning biological evolution, the Church does not have an official position on whether various life forms – like dinosaurs - developed and or went extinct over the course of time. However, it says that, if they did develop, then they did so under the impetus and guidance of God, and their ultimate creation must be ascribed to him. Pope Pius XII declared that "the teaching authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions . . . take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution..." While the Church permits belief in either special creation or developmental creation on certain questions, it in no circumstances permits belief in atheistic evolution.

The bottom line is God created everything that has ever lived or will ever live.

**Q: What has the Catholic Church said about Gustavo's Gutierrez's liberation theology book?**

A: In the modern era the Catholic Church will rarely, if ever, make any type of statement about a book. The exception would be if it is a heretical work that mis-represents or conflicts with Church teaching and only then if the book is widely enough read to serve as a source of scandal. In this case there has been much written about Gutierrez's book as he is often considered the founder of liberation theology. Unfortunately, much of what was espoused by the liberation theology framework is not in communion with Catholic social teaching and over the years warnings have been issued to its promoters.

You can read a bit about liberation theology's history, positive attributes and the concerns with extreme positions in the articles below. The bottom line is that one should be wary of Liberation Theology carried out to its extremes.

<https://catholicidentity.bne.catholic.edu.au/scripture/SitePages/Liberation-theology.aspx>

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html)

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/liberation-theology-just-a-corpse>

<https://www.catholic.com/qa/liberation-theology>

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/les-miserables-and-liberation-theology>

**Q: I like Halloween. I like movies like Hocus Pocus, Halloween, etc... and shows like Dracula and Wednesday. I like the visuals of Halloween, however that's where it stops. Is this bad?**

A: No. What you are describing is not bad at all as long as you are sound in your faith and you are not adopting related occult beliefs. Halloween emerged out of the Catholic celebration of All Hallows' Eve that refers to the Solemnity of all Saints. This video/article from Jimmy Akin of Catholic Answers will be a helpful view/read for you. <https://www.catholic.com/video/can-catholics-celebrate-halloween>

**Q: Was there a canon of Old Testament before Jesus? Who made it? Who had the authority to do so?**

A: There is no historical evidence that there was a universally accepted Jewish Old Testament canon prior to Jesus. Most scholars agree that it was not fixed until centuries after Jesus. There are those that would argue it was fixed within the first two centuries after Jesus, while others place it as far out as the 7th or 11th century with the creation of what are known as the Masoretic texts. Many try to make an argument that the Jewish Canon was settled at a "council" held Jamnia/Jabneh in AD 90 (half a century after Jesus' death). However, while the remnants of the Jewish religious authorities (mostly Pharisees) that had fled Jerusalem following the Jewish revolt and destruction of the Temple in AD 70 did have a school in Jamnia/Jabneh, there is no evidence of a formal council being held there or that any such meeting was universally recognized across the global Jewish community. At the same time, there are documented debates in the second century AD regarding the inspired nature the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes by the same school which would dispute the settlement of the canon in AD 90..



At the time of Jesus, the Jewish community was composed of a variety of sects. Even for Jews within Israel the Sadducees only accepted the Torah – The First 5 Books of the Old Testament (also known as the Pentateuch), while the Pharisees accepted a broader canon, and the Essenes accepted a canon that is broader still. The only consistent level of Jewish canonical acceptance at the time of Jesus seems to be outside of Israel where the Jews of the dispersion tended to rely on the canon of the Greek Septuagint produced two centuries prior to Jesus. Since the New Testament authors quote from the Septuagint more than any other version of the Old Testament writers it appears that canon was accepted by Jesus and the Apostles and hence it forms the basis of the Old Testament canon we recognize today.

The Catholic Church not very interested in declaring a canon in the first three centuries as it was focused on fighting persecution and heresy. While some Church Fathers (e.g. Athanasius) defined the books we accept today in both the Old and New Testaments as canonical, it was not until local councils in Rome (382), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397, 419) that official declarations of the canon as we know it were put forward. The first truly ecumenical council to do so was held in Florence (East-West unification council) in 1441. However, the infallibility of the canon was not declared in the council of Trent in 1546 in response to the Protestant elimination of what had been accepted elements of the canon for the previous thousand years.

The CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA has a detailed overview of the Development of the Old Testament Canon here that goes into greater detail of all of the high level development element I provide above. You can find that [HERE](#).

**Q: Why did pope Francis ban the traditional Latin mass. These people, perhaps millions, are doing nothing more than worshipping God, with their children, are they not?**

A: Thanks for your question. It is an important one that is surrounded by many misconceptions and misunderstandings. First off, I want to challenge your premise that Pope Francis “banned” the Latin Mass. When Pope Francis issued the [Motu Proprio, Traditionis Custodes](#) in July of 2021, he did not ban the use of the Traditional Latin Mass (A.K.A, Mass of 1962, Tridentine Mass, Extraordinary form, Mass of John XXIII). The Motu Proprio did restrict the use of that Mass both in terms of who could celebrate it and where those celebrations could occur, while giving Bishops a great deal of leeway to define the implementation of those restrictions in their diocese. Francis’ [letter to the Bishops](#) that accompanied the Motu Proprio further explained the rationale for this decision as did the Congregation for Divine Worship’s [Dubia](#) that followed in November 2021 that addressed the questions of the world-wide Bishops.

Taken out of its historical context this restriction would seem to be a lack of concern for the pastoral care of the many that love the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM). However, when you examine the history of our last three Popes (Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis) you may come away with a different understanding. While volumes can be written on this subject, I hope the few paragraphs below help you understand the context and history behind Francis’ Motu Proprio.

Let’s start with “[Redemptionis Sacramentum](#)” – a letter issued at the very end of the pontificate of John Paul II in 2004 with what is likely great input from Benedict XVI. The entire focus of this lengthy letter is the need to eliminate liturgical abuse. The letter covers a number of elements

very specifically but never once decries the Mass of Paul VI (A.K.A., Mass of 1969, Novus Ordo, Ordinary form) which, of course, both John Paul II and Benedict XVI had a hand in shaping. Pope Saint John Paul II's focus is waking Bishops around the world up to the crisis of individualism and entrepreneurship that had thwarted the Mass of Paul VI (something addressed in Francis' Motu Proprio as well).

Just three years later in the second year of Benedict's papacy "[Summorum Pontificum](#)" is released easing restrictions on the TLM. Some who failed to actually read the document have assumed that it was a recognition that the 1962 Mass was indeed a more reverent form. Yet that is not what the document states. Benedict starts on page one by stating, "It is well known that in every century of the Christian era the Church's Latin liturgy in its various forms has inspired countless saints in their spiritual life...an enriched their devotion." Benedict is making it clear that the Liturgy has been under constant development and in all of its forms it has been effective. He goes on to provide a brief history of its development starting with Gregory the Great (6<sup>th</sup> century), proceeding through Pius V (16<sup>th</sup> century) and working through subsequent papal liturgical reformers – Clement VIII, Urban VIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XII and John XXIII. At this point Benedict states, "In more recent times, the Second Vatican Council expressed the desire that the respect and reverence due to divine worship be renewed and adapted to the needs of our time." Far from condemning the Mass of Paul VI, Benedict is recognizing its noble purpose.

Benedict then goes on to echo what John Paul II recognized in "[Quattuor Abhinc Annos](#)" (1984) and "[Ecclesia Dei](#)" (1988) addressing the need of a small, but not immaterial, element of the faithful who, "...continued to be attached with such love and affection to the earlier liturgical reforms which had deeply shaped their culture and spirit (the TLM)." He also addresses the intention of the initial relaxation of rite instituted by John Paul II as a means of fostering unity to help bring schismatic groups back into full communion with the Church (e.g. SSPX). Benedict made it clear that the mass of Paul VI is the ordinary expression of the rule of prayer (lex orandi) while the Mass of 1962 is, "...to be considered the extraordinary expression of the same lex orandi."

Benedict's 5 articles in "[Summorum Pontificum](#)" are very brief and do include clear restrictions on the Mass of 1962. Benedict's [letter to global Bishops](#) provides a bit more detail and address the concerns that many had at the time, that this "easing" would detract from the authority of Vatican II. In response Benedict again reiterates that the Mass of Paul VI is the ordinary form and makes it clear that it is also the, "Normal form". Benedict does reiterate that his reasoning for easing restrictions was to meet the pastoral needs the people attached to the Mass of 1962. Benedict states in this letter that, "Pope John Paul II *felt obliged* to provide...in Ecclesia Dei guidelines for the use of the 1962 Missal...at the time the Pope primarily wanted to assist the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) to recover full unity with the successor of Peter." The point being that the purpose of easing restrictions was to serve the hope of unity not to bring back the Mass of 1962.

Benedict addresses a second concern in his letter – a fear, "...that the possibility of a wider use of the 1962 Missal would lead to disarray or even divisions within parish communities." Benedict did not believe this was possible as he clearly did not believe the Mass of 1962 would gain any

widespread use. Benedict states, "...the use of the old Missal presupposes a certain degree of liturgical formation and some knowledge of the Latin language; neither of these is found very often." Benedict did not foresee growth in the use of the 1962 Missal and stated clearly that in his opinion, "...the new Missal will certainly remain the ordinary form of the Roman rite." Benedict seems to have assumed that the community that "loved" the 1962 Missal would continue to decline as members died off and, therefore, restricting it beyond what he had already put in place served little purpose.

Benedict did leave open the possibility that this fear of spread of the 1962 Mass would lead to divisions was founded. At the end of the letter Benedict put a plan in place to get feedback from the Bishops around the world after three years had passed to determine if indeed divisions were being created. Unfortunately, the unfolding financial scandals and personal leaks that surrounded the end of Benedict's pontificate shifted this to the back burner to be picked up by Francis in 2019 and 2020. The sum of the feedback that was eventually received (12-13 years later not 3 years later) convinced Francis that not only was the fear founded, but that unless something was done the problem of a Traditional Latin Mass vs Novus Ordo split would grow. While it was only a minority of Traditional Latin Mass and Novus Ordo mass lovers that fostered this, "our liturgy is better than yours" position, it was already enough to become a public talking point as the term "Liturgy Wars" now regularly appeared in both religious and secular media.

I know that is a lot, but I wanted to give you as much information as possible in hopes that you can share it with others as far too much misinformation surrounds this topic and its history. I hope all of this helps.

## Week of 02/19/23

**Q: Does the Catholic Church, particularly the USCCB support the main political message of "Black Lives Matter" that the police or criminal justice system is racist?**

A: The Church does not support one political view over another. The Church supports the teachings of Jesus Christ as given to us through divine revelation and very clearly articulated IN the third section of the Catechism of The Catholic Church (CCC 1691-2557). This is why there is no singular political party or group that the Church is aligned with as Catholic Social Teaching agrees with elements of them all and disagrees with other elements of them all.

That said CCC 1935 lays out Catholic teaching on racism as follows, " The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design."

Duties of Civil Authorities, which include the elements of the criminal justice system do have certain duties in the eyes of the Church. These duties are clearly laid out in CCC 2234-2237. That section is summed up very well in CCC 2237 when it states, "Political authorities are obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person. They will dispense justice humanely by

respecting the rights of everyone, especially of families and the disadvantaged. The political rights attached to citizenship can and should be granted according to the requirements of the common good. They cannot be suspended by public authorities without legitimate and proportionate reasons. Political rights are meant to be exercised for the common good of the nation and the human community.”

All that said the organization called Black Lives Matter has listed on its website several core principles that are in opposition to Church teaching. First and foremost of these is the BLM organizations stated desire to eliminate the nuclear family as outlined in their statement of beliefs as follows: “We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.” Most people are unaware that this is a foundational pillar of that organization and I would encourage everyone to read about some of their other core beliefs [HERE](#). While the Church is aligned with many of the BLM core beliefs as with all political entities the Church finds itself in conflict with a number of others.

**Q: I'm leading an Ascension Press Lectio/Eucharist small group study, and the question arose about how to reconcile the fact that we think of Jesus as our brother, but that as the Great High Priest He could also be considered a father to us in that we call priests "Father." An answer given in the Leader's Guide says that "the title 'Father' for priests is not simply a title but also describes the relationship they are to have with the people -- a spiritual father to God's sons and daughters." That made sense to me, but others were requesting clarification, and I thought of you... And if you don't mind my asking another "relationship" question: How do we think of priests and nuns as both being married to the Church when priests are male and nuns are female? I've tried to sort this out by thinking that nuns are married to Jesus, while priests are married to the Church. This sounds like flimsy theology, though. Thank you for your help. I have another question about understanding the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head, but have to properly formulate it first...**

A: As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) states in paragraph [CCC 239](#), “By calling God ‘Father,’ the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children.” Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders priests assume a share in the Spiritual Fatherhood of God the Father. Perhaps the most pointed New Testament reference to the theology of the spiritual fatherhood of priests is Paul’s statement, “I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” ([1 Cor. 4:14–15](#)). Your Leader’s Guide is explaining this but I hope that the addition of the verse from St. Paul’s letter help to provide a biblical reference for this belief.

Your second questions you answered well on your own when you state that, “...nuns are married to Jesus, while priests are married to the Church.” You can start with [CCC 796](#) which explains the role of Jesus as bridegroom to the Church. When you combine that with [CCC 1547](#) which explains how, “The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, ‘each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ,’” you can see how by extension Priests are also married to the Church. As

for religious sisters the [CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA](#) has a detailed entry that includes several references to the history of considering consecrated religious sisters brides of Christ. You can find that entry [HERE](#).

I hope this provides some of the clarification that you need and will allow you to offer your study group some reference to examine.

**Q: This is about abstaining from meat on ordinary Fridays, not Lent. I live in a very rural area and seafood is a luxury. I am trying to learn to deny myself. One way is to practice eating vegetarian or fish on every Friday. Usually this works well for me, I eat a lot of eggs. However once or twice a month my husband go out for a date night. Because of kids and schedules Friday is usually the best day for us to go out. There is only one bar/restaurant, and they have no vegetarian options. On Fridays they do serve bacon wrapped shrimp, that I can get without the bacon. But this seems very decedent. I feel as though I am following the rules while missing the spirit of the practice. To give you a reference, I could get a decent sized steak cheaper then the shrimp. Would it not make more be closer to the spirit of the practice for me to eat a plain hamburger then to eat the Shrimp? I feel like the Date nights are very important and I hate to give those up. The date nights are never planned, they are just something that happens when we are able. I could switch to meatless Thursdays if that is the best answer, I just wanted to get better at denying myself.**

Thanks for that question. I admire your zeal for the faith, desire to achieve self-mastery and your commitment to fostering your marriage. Fasting and abstinence are not only great forms of penance (see the [Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC 1434](#) and [CCC 1438](#)), but are also great ways of achieving self-mastery by taming our desire for food. This, in turn, can help train us to develop that same self-mastery for our desires for those sinful things we are drawn to (See [CCC 2043](#) that reiterates this) through our [concupiscence](#) (definition from the [CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA](#)).

As I am sure you are aware, Friday's are indeed a penitential day throughout the year (Jimmy Akin of Catholic Answer has a great explanation of this [HERE](#) if you need it). That said, the only days that we are required to abstain from meat are Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all Fridays during Lent (See USCCB article [HERE](#)). All other Fridays, we are required to perform a penitential act, but that does not have to be abstinence from meat.

Choosing the dish with the meat removed is a great option to help you stick with your commitment to the meatless Friday's discipline. However, if you feel that is an extravagance that you should not indulge in you have a couple of options.

- 1) Your own suggestion is a good one – shift your abstinence day to Thursday (outside of required Fridays) as you would get the same spiritual benefit from self-mastery. You would also be free to enjoy time with your husband and family without worrying about this restriction. Just remember to substitute another penitential act on those Fridays.
- 2) Keep up this practice on Fridays. However, on those Fridays where it is impractical, substitute another penitential act. You should not feel as if you are not meeting your commitment as God is pleased you are working so diligently at something that is not

required but brings such great spiritual benefits. God is certainly aware of the limitations that your situation presents.

**Q: What is the Catholic Church stance on using condoms in marriage if only one spouse is HIV positive? I've seen different comments from popes recently on this. Additionally, would it matter if the wife is medically unable to have children, so it is not used a contraceptive but as a medical device similar to women using contraceptives for medical reasons. Thanks**

A: That's an important question. It's answer is going to involve something known as the principal of double effect. The bottom line is that, "The Church does not consider illicit the use of those therapeutic means necessary to cure bodily diseases, even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from—provided such impediment is not directly intended for any motive whatsoever." (*Humanae Vitae* 15). In other words, contraceptive used to prevent or treat a disease is acceptable if the primary intent is not contraception. Rather, the contraceptive effect is a secondary effect of the medical precaution or treatment being employed.

Catholic Answers has a great article explaining the principle of double effect as it relates to the use of contraceptives that you can find [HERE](#). If you are still concerned you can contact the National Catholic Bio-Ethics Center (<https://www.ncbcenter.org/>). They will happily get on the phone and walk you through the Catholic moral teaching and its implications as it relates to your specific situation. The NCBcenter has a great article on this particular topic that you can find [HERE](#) that references some of the teachings of recent Popes.

I hope this is helpful. I urge you to contact the NCBcenter if you need further information or would like to discuss the issue in greater detail to obtain peace of mind. They are the best resource on the planet for these types of questions and they do an excellent job examine the details of one's particular case to come to the best possible conclusion.

**Q: My husband and I are reading through the Catholic Catechism, and we have some questions from the paragraphs about the sacrament of penance.**

**From paragraph 1479, if the church's treasury is limitless due to the deposits of Jesus' infinite merit, as well as Mary's and the Saints' merit, why are indulgences necessary to access that abundance of merit on behalf of those who have died and are presently undergoing the purification of purgatory—or even those who are undergoing purification while still living? The temporal punishment must be paid, but given the infinite treasury of the church, why is the temporal punishment not just paid? If there is value of the purification process, then why allow it to be paid by the mercy and works of others? Would not the gift of indulgences then deprive a penitent person the value of working through their own purification? If this is not the case, and it just needs to be paid and there is no inherent value of the punishment, why not just bestow a gift from the limitless supply in the church's treasury?**

**On the same topic, but from paragraph 1477, why do Mary's prayers and good works contribute to the church's treasury more so than the other prayers and works of the others saints? Is this simply due to her status as immaculately conceived and preserved without sin? – Is it that if she is truly sinless that all of her works and prayers would benefit others and not herself because she would not**

**need the positive effect of these works toward her own purification? Or rather does it have something to do with her status as Theotokos?**

A: Thanks for those questions. They are good ones that demonstrate you are really seeking to understand ([Matthew 7:7](#)). I want to congratulate both you and your husband on taking the step to deepen your understanding of Catholic teaching by exploring the Catechism ([Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)). It is the second-best book on our faith ever written in my opinion.

Let's start with one of your premises. Indulgences are NOT necessary to access that abundance of merit. They are one way the Church has defined to do so based upon the power Jesus granted when He gave the Church the power to bind and loose ([Matthew 16:19](#) and [Mathew 18:18](#)). However, we can also perform corporal and spiritual works of mercy (see [CCC 1473](#) and especially [CCC 2447](#)) to achieve a similar result for ourselves or someone who has died in God's friendship (free of the guilt of mortal sin) but for whom temporal punishment remains to satisfy justice or where a spiritual attachment to sin is present. An indulgence is a special act of charity / mercy that is defined by the Church and available on a permanent or temporary basis that results in the remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins, whose guilt is already forgiven. (See CCC Glossary). God could choose to define an infinite number of way that our debts could be paid – indulgences and corporal works of mercy, and spiritual works of mercy are methods he chose for us.

The answer to the question, "...given the infinite treasury of the church, why is the temporal punishment not just paid?" can be found in [CCC 1847](#) where the insight of [St. Augustine](#) is quoted - "God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us." God wants us to participate in our own salvation and the salvation of other members of Christ's body. To do otherwise would deprive us of the dignity that our nature is due.

To the question concerning which commandment is the greatest Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)) When we perform acts of love for others, we are participating in both our own salvation and the salvation of others by demonstrating that love of neighbor which in turn also demonstrate our love of God. In doing so we are not, "...(depriving) a penitent person the value of working through their own purification." Rather, we are using the greatest medicine of all – love – to achieve that purification and doing so in a selfless manner. (See [CCC 1844](#)) When we offer our love freely for the good of others it has the effect of lifting them up.

As for your second question regarding the value of Mary's intercession for us (or her contribution to the treasures of the faith relative to others) the answer can be found in the letter of James where it is written, "...pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." ([James 5:16](#)) There is no human person more righteous than Mary (Note: Jesus is a Divine person) for all the reasons you state above – her sinlessness, her faith, her trusting obedience, and most certainly her relationship to Jesus which is closer than that of any human. That said, even her merits are nothing when compared to those of Jesus. His sacrifice was infinite and hence his merits are equally infinite, while Mary's merits are finite as she is a finite being just like us.

**Q: Did Jesus speak Latin? I realize he is God and knows all, but as a man did he know it and speak it? What is real evidence either way?**

A: This is a fun question, and we will need to speculate just a bit to provide you with a response. Let's start with when Latin was first spoken. According to the Ancient Languages Institute (<https://ancientlanguage.com/>):

*"The birth of Latin took place around 700 BC in a small settlement sloping up towards Palatine Hill. The speakers of this language were called Romans, after their legendary founder, Romulus. At the time, Rome was not a powerful empire. Far from it, the Romans were an insignificant people group with a population of a few thousand. They slept in windowless huts, spoke their own language, worshipped their own gods, and enjoyed their own way of doing things — just like so many other groups to be found in Italy at the time."*

Therefore, it is not impossible that Christ could have spoken Latin as it was a language that existed long before His incarnation. That said, it was not until, "A few centuries after Christ, (that) Latin became the equal of Greek as a language of literature, philosophy, science, and theology." (<https://ancientlanguage.com/>) Therefore, it is unlikely that a 1<sup>st</sup> century resident of Palestine would have had much exposure to Latin.

Even the Roman occupiers of Palestine spoke primarily Greek as that was the universal language of commerce in that age. The chronicle of Christ mission and teachings – The New Testament - which was written by Apostles or companions of the Apostles was written primarily in Greek with the possibility that some original documents (or parts thereof) were written in Aramaic. The first Latin versions of either the Old or New Testament texts emerged well after the Apostolic age. [St. Jerome](#) was asked to compile a complete and accurate Latin translation of the Bible by Pope Damasus in 382 A.D. There were other various Old Latin versions in circulation at the time, but even those likely date to no more than late second or third century. Jerome's translation became the standard Latin version of the Bible for the Western Latin-speaking Church in the fourth and fifth century.

Catholic answers provides some interesting speculation on Christ's communication with the Latin speaking Pontius Pilate in this article = > <https://www.catholic.com/qa/were-any-of-the-gospels-written-in-christs-own-language> The article states:

*"We do not know whether Pilate used a translator in his conversations with Christ. As a Roman governor, Pilate would have known Latin (his native language) and Greek (the international language). He might also have known some Aramaic, since he was governor of an Aramaic-speaking territory. Even if he did not know Aramaic, many Jews would have no problem conversing with him; Greek was the language of commerce, and many Jews knew it from their business dealings. Thus, Jesus' conversations with Pilate might have been conducted in Greek."*

The bottom line is while it is not impossible that Jesus spoke Latin, the evidence we have indicates he would have been familiar with his native tongue – Aramaic – the language of



international trade at the time – Greek – and likely the version of Old Testament Hebrew that was read and spoken in the Temple and Synagogues. Even this understanding is speculation based upon available data and norms. Expecting that Jesus would have understood Latin is highly unlikely and not something proposed by most Biblical scholars.

## Week of 02/12/23

**Q: What if there was a couple (man and woman) who try their best to obey God and they try to have children naturally and can't? Would them using IVF being a huge sin?**

A: This is a very sensitive topic. For a couple in this position, I can't imagine the pain that it causes. That said, the Church teaching on IVF is clear (it is gravely immoral) and can be found in the Catechism paragraphs 2373-2379. The relevant elements of that section are contained below:

**2376: Techniques that entail the dissociation of husband and wife, by the intrusion of a person other than the couple (donation of sperm or ovum, surrogate uterus), are gravely immoral.** These techniques (heterologous artificial insemination and fertilization) infringe the child's right to be born of a father and mother known to him and bound to each other by marriage. They betray the spouses' "right to become a father and a mother only through each other."

**2377 Techniques involving only the married couple (homologous artificial insemination and fertilization) are perhaps less reprehensible yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. The act which brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves to one another, but one that "entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. Such a relationship of domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children."**

The current IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) technology has the added problem of producing fertilized human embryos – living human beings – that are destined for termination as part of the IVF process and / or being condemned to a life frozen in time as they are maintained in storage. Both of these are intrinsic evils and can never be tolerated.

For more information on this topic, you can contact the National Catholic Bioethics Center (<https://www.ncbcenter.org/>) for advice and counsel. At the same time, Many Catholic are not aware of the advances in Church approved NaPro technology that provides a morally acceptable solutions that many medical professionals are not aware of. You can find out more about that here => <https://www.ncbcenter.org/making-sense-of-bioethics-cms/column-145-considering-the-options-for-infertile-couples>

Additional Catholic teaching on this topic can be found at the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) website here => <https://www.usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/infertility>

Finally, this article from CAN (Catholic News Agency) highlights the value of support groups for Catholic couples struggling with this issue =>

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/248570/catholic-infertility-ministry-provides-community-support>

**Q: Hi! I'm in high school and I grew up Catholic and in a Catholic school. I want to take my faith to the next level. I've always been super faithful and never really questioned or doubted things until now. My mind fully believes and wants to, but for some reason I'm having a hard time. Thoughts keep popping into my head (I have OCD also) that are making me question why God deserves praise and how isn't it vain when He wants us to worship to Him and how He tells us our ultimate goal is to see His face and be with Him forever. I was also thinking of when Our Lady of Guadalupe asked us to pray the rosary everyday, but then I thought "isn't the rosary worshipping her? isn't that a bit conceited?" and the same for when God gave us the Our Father. I also know that the angels worship God in Heaven but if we worship God because He knows it will benefit us and not because he needs it, why do they praise Him since they're pure and He doesn't NEED their praise either? I immediately push these thoughts away as I know I don't believe them but they keep coming back up. I'm not really sure what to do and I'm getting discouraged but I want with all my heart to be closer to Him through this journey but it seems the harder I try, it's just making me question more and more everyday and I don't know why. Thank you so much for your help and for reading.**

A: Those are all reasonable questions. I am glad you asked them. I am also happy to hear that you "want to take your faith to the next level." This means your faith is maturing and with that maturity we naturally start to pose questions and address difficulties that in our less mature faith we tend to ignore/overlook. The first thing you need to know is that it is OK to struggle a bit with faith as you dive deeper into it and begin asking questions. God gave us intellect and will for a reason – He expects us to use it. At the same time, as Saint John Henry Newman stated, "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt." We are asked to acknowledge and work through our difficulties as that is how you take your faith to the next level.

Paragraph 2088 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) describes the type of "involuntary doubt" that you are experiencing as, "...hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity." Rest assured you are doing the right thing by seeking answers and you should never stop doing so. I will try to provide the answers to some of the difficulties you are experiencing that are leading to this involuntary doubt below.

Why God deserves praise and how isn't it vain when He wants us to worship to Him and how He tells us our ultimate goal is to see His face and be with Him forever?

As CCC 2096 and 2097 state, "Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love...To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the "nothingness of the creature" who would not exist but for God...The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world." In other words, as creatures that owe our very ongoing existence to God who created us purely out of love (there is nothing in it for Him), adoration and worship is our only just response. God does not demand our worship. Right reason demands it. Unfortunately, our

right reason is clouded by our fall and hence we sometime struggle with knowing and doing what is right. As a result, God gives us guardrails (e.g., the Ten Commandments) to help us choose the right and prevent us from “turning in on ourselves,” and setting ourselves up as God.

The reality is our existence is due to sharing in God’s being. We are nothing without that gift of being and this is why St. Augustine tells us in his Confessions that, “You have made us for yourself O Lord & our heart is restless until it rests in you.” We cannot be complete until we return to the origin of our being. It’s like we have a God shaped hole in our hearts that we try to fill with many different things, when the only thing that can fill it is God. It is not being vain when Jesus tells us we want to see God (e.g., “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” MT 5:8). According to Websters Dictionary vanity is, “inflated pride in oneself or one’s appearance: CONCEIT.” Jesus is simply expressing a truth and confirming what St. Augustine would say three centuries later – our ultimate satisfaction only comes with the Beatific Vision.

“I was also thinking of when Our Lady of Guadalupe asked us to pray the rosary every day, but then I thought “isn’t the rosary worshipping her? isn’t that a bit conceited?” and the same for when God gave us the Our Father.”

First off, let us be very clear that we do not worship Mary. She is a creature like you and me. Paragraph 971 of the CCC states this clearly when it says, “The Church rightly honors the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of ‘Mother of God,’ to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs.... This very special devotion ... differs essentially from the adoration (emphasis added) which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration (of our triune God, emphasis added). The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an epitome of the whole Gospel, express this devotion to the Virgin Mary.”

This fostering of adoration of God through Marian devotion is seen very clearly in the Rosary which is a prayer that engages one in a meditation on the life and saving actions of Jesus. The Rosary provides you with an opportunity to walk in Jesus’s shoes. The Joyful Mysteries allow us to meditate on the mystery of the incarnation and it’s meaning, the Luminous Mysteries allow us to meditate on Christ’s mission and salvific teachings, the Sorrowful mysteries allow us to meditate on Christ Passion, and the Glorious Mysteries allow us to mediate on our salvation from Sin and Death and the promise of eternity. The Rosary is not a means of worshipping Mary; praying the rosary is a means of coming closer to Jesus by walking in his footsteps.

As for the Our Father, it was gift to us from Jesus to teach us how to pray (speak with our heavenly Father). We find it in both Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11:1-4 . When praying The Our Father we are acknowledging God in the first three petitions and then offering the final four petitions for our needs. Even in honoring God, we are praying for God’s kingdom to be brought to completeness so that God’s will reigns on heaven and earth which is our ultimate goal. We then go on to pray for God to continue to meet our daily needs as well as the grace to forgive those who hurt us as God forgive us when we separate ourselves from Him. Finally, pray that he preserves us from temptations beyond what we are capable of resisting and that God continues to protect us from the domination of Satan. It is about expressing what we need from God. God

knows these needs before we do, but by praying this way we become more aware of what we really need ourselves. It is a great gift to us, not an ego boost for God.

I apologize for the length of this answer but I wanted to honor your questions with reasonably complete answers and you had several concerns laid out above. I hope that these answers help you and I encourage you to keep asking questions and seeking guidance when difficulties arise.

**Q: When Christ tells us to be perfect does he mean he makes us perfect on the cross when we acknowledge him as our Savior, or is he telling us to be free from sin? If we can be free from sin, do I not say the “I confess” prayer in Mass if I haven’t sinned in that week?**

A: The verse you are referring to appears in Matthew’s Gospel MT 5:48, “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” This is in the midst of the sermon on the mount where Jesus has just finished giving us the Beatitudes and teaching us about the law. It is in context of him teaching on the need to “love your enemies and to pray for those that persecute you.” (MT 5:43-45). Later in MT 19:21 Jesus uses a similar phrasing when He tells the rich young man, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

What Jesus is communicating in both places is the need to strive for a love like that of God’s - a self-giving and unconditional love. We are not to hold onto the false Gods of pleasure, money, or power. At the same time, we must hold ourselves to a higher standard of moral conduct. Jesus points out, “... for (God) makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?” (MT 5:45-47) It is a call for Jesus’s disciples to reflect the Father’s perfect, committed, selfless, merciless love on their own lives. See CCC 2013 and CCC 2842 for more on this striving from perfect love and forgiveness referencing this verse.

There is nowhere in scripture that Jesus claims to have made us perfect or sin free. We do believe that Jesus’ sacrifice was so infinitely perfect that it can take away the guilt of all of our sin – for people in the past, present and future. It does require that we seek that forgiveness using the ordinary means Jesus established for His church (e.g., Sacramental Confession). Jesus also was well aware of our broken nature and the likelihood that we would surrender to our concupiscence and sin repeatedly during our lifetime. He wants us to strive for perfection and continue to accept His graces to get closer and closer to that state when we fail, but Jesus recognizes that perfection for us will likely only be attained as we are purified (purgated) prior to heaven.

If you find yourself in a position where you truly believe you are free of both venial and mortal sins you should still pray the “Confiteor” in its entirety. It is a prayer acknowledging our past sins (no timeframe defined) and is it not intended to be a statement about the cleanliness of your soul at that specific time. We have all sinned in the past and will all likely sin again. Even if you have not sinned recently, you remain a sinner and are simply asking for the forgiveness of both the community and God as you continue to work towards the state of perfect charity by accepting and applying God’s freely given grace.

**Q: For the sacraments to produce their desired effect, the receiver must have some sort of disposition (like for confession, you must have contrition for all your sins). From what I understand, for all of them, faith, or someone else's faith (like in infant baptism) is necessary. What about in the case that happens so much nowadays where teenagers who are apathetic to the Church get confirmed (some of which don't really care about God, haven't gone to confession)? If (and hopefully when) they revert, they don't have to get re-confirmed because the sacrament was valid. How does this work? Let me know if you have a good answer for this or if any of the assumption, I made were wrong. Thanks!**

Thanks for your question. It is an important one. Let's start with your assumption that, "For the sacraments to produce their desired effect, the receiver must have some sort of disposition." You have rightly pointed out that in the Sacrament of reconciliation the penitent must have contrition – perfect or imperfect (see paragraphs 1450-1454 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)) – for the absolution of the confessed sins to be effective. That said, the Church teaches us that the sacraments act *ex opera operato* (by the very fact of the action's being performed) in CCC 1127-1128. Specifically, in CCC 1128 we are told that, "...the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God. From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them."

What this means is that the graces that the Sacraments are "delivered" when the sacrament is validly administered (proper form and matter). In the case you mention above where the teenager is not properly disposed at the time of confirmation, the grace of the sacrament can be "unlocked" at a later date when the individual's disposition changes and they open themselves up to that grace. At the same time, the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders are the three sacraments that impose an indelible mark on the recipient (See CCC 1272, 1304, and 1582) and hence can only be received once as the mark is present regardless of the disposition of the recipient. The other four sacraments – Reconciliation, Communion, Matrimony, and Anointing of the Sick – leave no such mark and can be received multiple times. This is great news for us Catholics as we have access to reconciliation as often as we need it and Communion as often as we want it (up to two times a day).

NOTE: The teaching on efficacious nature of the Sacraments despite the disposition of the recipient or administrator was definitively declared in the 16th century at the council of Trent, but was first addressed in a response to Donatism (4th century heresy). Donatism was condemned by Pope Miltiades (311-314), by the Council of Arles in 314, and written on extensively by St. Augustine (354-430). If you would like to know more about Donatism you can read about here => <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/donatism>

**Q: Hi. I'm having trouble with Vatican 2. I keep coming across arguments about issues with Vatican 2. And it's frustrating and a distraction in my faith. I will see a video of someone saying there are no issues, but then they kind of signal that there is something deeper and hidden (like a little smile or facial expressions...not much, but there). Or a word that makes me think something is wrong with the Church. What is the issue with Vatican 2? Should I be concerned? What is happening?**

A: Thanks for the question. It is one that many have. The good news is that much of what you hear in the public square about Vatican II is from people that have little to no understanding of the output (16 documents, 4 Constitutions) of that council. I constantly find that those that challenge Vatican II have not read the documents and are basing their challenge upon what they assume about Vatican II or have heard second hand. In some cases, there are even those that are familiar with the outcome of the council but wish Vatican II had produced a different result.

Here is what you need to know:

1. Vatican II was a valid council where overwhelming majorities of the council participants approved its outcomes. This includes, most importantly, the Pope (Paul VI) that was on the chair of Peter when the council closed in 1965.
2. The four main documents (the constitutions) are some of the most beautiful documents the Church has ever produced: 1) Sacrosanctum Concilium (Sacred Liturgy), 2) Lumen Gentium (The Church), 3) Dei Verbum (Divine Revelation), 4) Gaudium et Spes (The Modern World) and I recommend that everyone read them.
3. There were no major doctrinal changes made as a result of the council. There was quite a bit of pastoral advice offered along with a wealth of clarification on Catholic teaching.
4. It usually takes 50-100 years for the output of a council to be fully implemented. Our last few Popes (Pope Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis) have all made strides in fostering that implementation. John Paul II and Benedict XVI were major players in the council themselves and understood it well.
5. Its purpose was to “open the windows of the Church” to let its beauty out to a world that sorely needed it. Unfortunately, there was a vocal minority of Theologians and council participants that the window would be opened to let the world in so that Church doctrine could be modified to more accurately reflect current societal norms. You will often hear the term, “In the Spirit of Vatican II”, used by this vocal majority who want to ignore the actual council output in favor of what they believe the council should have done. That is not how Christ’s Church works – everything we believe is based upon divine revelation (oral and written) and it is not up to us to create or modify the teachings that God handed us based upon societal conditions at any given time.

The bottom line is that you need not be worried. In Matthew 16:18 (BibleGateway.com) Jesus promised that “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against (the Church).” In Matthew 28:20 Jesus also promised that, “I am with you always, til the close of the age.” Finally in John 16:12-14 Jesus promised to send, “...the Spirit of truth (who) will guide you to all truth” (this promise was fulfilled at Pentecost as described in Acts 2). Christ’s Church has thrived for 2,000 years despite the attempts of men to destroy it and the brokenness of its leadership (at times) to effectively guide it. This clearly demonstrates that Jesus’ promises are indeed being fulfilled.

**Q: I pray the daily prayer, three times a day with the Christian prayer book. Morning Evening and Night prayer. Seeing on EWTN a program about singing the liturgy of the hours, and wanting to do such, what part of the Christian prayer book would I sing?**

A: Praying the Liturgy of the Hours (also known as “The Divine Office”) is a great practice to engage in so I would be happy to explain what it is and point you to some resources that will let you get started. The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition (Catholic University of America

Press, 2003, Volume 8, pgs. 729-736 – often available at public libraries) provides an excellent overview of its history, development, structure and use. The online [CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA](#) has a brief article on it that you may find informative (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11219a.htm>) that includes links that will lead you to other articles describing all the elements.

The Liturgy of the Hours is composed of Psalms, hymns, scriptural, patristic, and hagiographic readings and prayers. It is the public liturgy of the Church that sanctifies her (the Church) throughout specific periods of the day. In its current form, (It was last significantly revised after Vatican II) the complete Divine Office is composed of seven daily periods of prayer: 1) The “Office of Readings” that can be prayed any time of the day, “Morning Prayer” (Lauds), “Mid-Morning Prayer” (Terce), “Midday Prayer” (Sext), “Afternoon Prayer” (None), “Evening Prayer” (Vespers) and “Night Prayer” (Compline). The distribution of the prayers throughout the day reflects the Church’s response to the Lord’s commandment to “Pray Always” (Luke 18:1). The words found in Psalm 119:164, “Seven times a day I praise you...” inspired the development of the seven periods of daily prayer the Divine Office contains.

Traditionally, monastic orders pray all seven hours as their life is dedicated to prayer and doing so requires a significant amount of time and devotion. Following the Vatican II revival and reform of the Divine Office it was mandated that unless Terce, Sext, and None can be prayed in choir (likely only in Monasteries, Convents, and Seminaries) only one of them should be selected as prayer during the workday. This selection is now termed “Middle Hour.” This has the effect of reducing the number of prayer periods from seven to five for most of the faithful. Priests commit to praying all five of these hours daily and Deacons commit to praying the two that are considered most important – Lauds and Vespers. Following Vatican II, the laity were encouraged to join in this practice praying as many of the hours as their circumstance permits.

Getting started with the praying of the Divine Office used to be difficult as identifying and navigating the various readings and hymns was complex; requiring several books (usually a set of four although later reduced to one) and quite a bit of back and forth from section to section. This has been made much easier now with smartphone applications like Universalis, iBreviary, and Laudate have been created and that present the ordered readings for you and even provide reminders throughout the day as each prayer period arrives. In addition, Bishop Barron’s Word on Fire Institute has produced a monthly booklet that is available on a [subscription basis](#) that simplifies getting started as it presents the reading for three major hours in an easy to use format. If you want to know more about how the Divine Office works and how Word on Fire’s offering can help you get started you can visit go [HERE](#).

## Week of 02/05/23

### **Q: Why did God harden Pharaoh’s heart?**

A: This is a great question. It is a reference to Exodus 7:3, 9:12 (and others places in the Exodus story) where God seems to be saying that He is making sure that Pharaoh refuses the requests of Moses and Aaron despite the plagues and evidence for God’s power that are on display. This

paints a picture of an evil and manipulative God that simply is not the God we know, so how do we explain it? Jimmy Akin of Catholic Answers provides a great explanation, so rather than create my own, I will point you to Jimmy – <https://www.catholic.com/video/why-would-god-harden-someones-heart>

**Q: If Genesis is not literal what is the meaning of Adam and Eve? Why does Patrick Madrid continue to state that Adam was the first man and Eve was the first Woman?**

A: The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the Church teaching on creation very well in CCC 282-289. The Church teaches us that the first 11 Chapters of Genesis reveal fundamental truths – God created everything out of nothing and sustains it in existence, God created our first parents, our first parents chose against God and lost the grace they had been endowed with, etc... However the Church does not teach that the account is a historical or scientific account of creation – see CCC 337. That said, we do believe that we had two first parents that were our ancestors - whether these were God’s first creation or the two that were first given a eternal soul is often debated, but what is not is that all human life (human beings endowed with a rational soul) as we know it flowed from these first two. Lately science has been agreeing with the church as the genetic data is pointing towards a reality that human evolution can be traced back to a single woman. The Church teaching on our first parents can be found in CCC 355-368. Therefore, we can and do say that Genesis (at least the first 11 chapters) represent fundamental truths from a pre-historical period while at the same time affirming that all rational human beings evolved from our first two parents that we identify as Adam & Eve.

**Q: If Adam knew his wife (reference to Genesis 4:1) what does the scripture mean where it says that Mary did not know man until she gave birth to Jesus (a reference to Luke 1:34, and Matthew 1:25 – two verses combined)?**

A: Scripture is pretty clear that the spirit would come upon Mary to facilitate her pregnancy (Luke 1:35) despite the fact that she has not had sexual relations with a man. You can read about this and its meaning in CCC 496-507. One thing that does through people is when in Matthew 1:25 where it says of Joseph, “He had no relations with her until she bore a son...” Many have pointed to this and said doesn’t that mean Joseph did have relations with Mary (Know Mary) after Jesus was born and if this is the case doesn’t that mean Mary was not a perpetual virgin. Tim Staples of Catholic Answers does a great job explaining this, so I am going to leverage his work here => <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/how-we-know-mary-was-a-perpetual-virgin-0>

**Q: You mention that the six days of creation match up well with the order in which God created things. It was in the order of what?**

A: What I believe I said was that creation as it is portrayed in the six days of Genesis matches up pretty well with what science tells us about how our world evolved from a state of lesser to higher order. The chart below shows the six “days” of creation against how modern evolutionary theory portrays the development of our planet and everything on it.



<b>Day</b>	<b>Genesis</b>	<b>Modern Science</b>
1	Darkness...Light	Nothing...Big Bang
2	Water/Atmosphere and Land	Creation of Earth
3	Land filled with Plants	Plants first in evolutionary process
4	Stars, Sun, Moon	Stars, Sun, Moon become visible from Earth
5	Water Animals, Birds, Bugs	Water animals and simple bugs came after plants in the evolutionary process
6	Complex Mammals and Humans	Mammals come last in the evolutionary process

**Q: If I am divorced am I qualified to apply to the priesthood?**

A: I would need more information to provide you with a definitive answer but let offer some general guidelines and a starting point for you to pursue. If your marriage was valid (e.g. two Baptized Catholics, freely entering the marriage with full knowledge, sacramentally married in the Catholic Church) a civil divorce does not end the marriage in the eyes of the Church. This is clearly outlined in Canon 1141 of Canon Law and in paragraphs 1638-1640 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). At the same time Canon 1042 prohibits a validly married man from being ordained a priest.

Therefore, the first step would be to determine if your marriage is indeed valid in the eyes of the Church. The best place to start would be a conversation with your Pastor. If your Pastor determines that the conditions for a valid marriage were not present at the time you were married, then you could pursue a declaration of nullity (states the marriage did not occur because of one or more impediments – see CCC 1629). Obtaining a declaration of nullity from a competent ecclesiastical tribunal in your diocese would be the necessary first step before you could be considered as a candidate for the priesthood. Assuming there are no other impediments, and you meet all other requirements for the priesthood, you would be free to pursue the priesthood (your Pastor would be a helpful starting point here as well).

**WEEK of 01/29/23**

NOTE: We took a blue bucket vacation over the holidays but got a couple this week. Let's keep them coming!

**Q: Does plan B count? If abortion is illegal when why do we sell plan B?**

A: Let's start with the second half of that question. Abortion is not illegal in most of the United States at the moment. The reversal of the Roe vs Wade decision in late 2022 did not illegalize abortion but merely put the decision as to whether it is legal or illegal back into the hands of each individual state. In states like California abortion is not only legal but protection of it has

been extended to the moment of birth. Hence, it remains legal in the state of California to distribute and sell Plan B.

The Plan B pill (Levonorgestrel) is a hormone that can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex or after another birth control method fails. Abortion is the killing of an unborn human person. 96% of the world's biologists agree that a human being's life begins when a woman's egg is fertilized, irrespective of whether it subsequently implants in the wall of their mother's uterus. Plan B is an abortifacient because it can prevent the implantation of a human embryo in their woman's womb. So it not only works as a contraceptive, it can also work as an abortifacient. It is intrinsically evil to use plan B as a result!

**Q: Why can't Catholic priests be married?**

A: There are 24 different Churches that employ seven different rites that are part of the one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in full communion with the Pope of Rome. Because priestly celibacy is a discipline, not a doctrine, there is room for diversity on the issue of priestly celibacy according to the customs of the respective rites. If celibacy were a doctrine, all rites would have to conform to the judgment of the Holy See on the matter because doctrines are true for everybody. But celibacy is a discipline (a practice that is legislated by proper ecclesial authority) that has been deemed to be spiritually beneficial. In the Latin rite, this spiritual discipline ordinarily is required of all men who seek priestly ordination. In the Eastern rites, it is practiced by the monks and by some secular priests, but it is not required of all men who seek ordination. Out of respect for the longstanding customs of the Eastern-rite churches, the Vatican allows the Eastern churches in communion with the Holy See to maintain their own properly constituted discipline on this issue.

The reasons Latin rite priests can't marry are both theological and canonical. Theologically, it may be pointed out that priests serve in the place of Christ and therefore, their ministry specially configures them to Christ. As is clear from Scripture, Christ was not married (except in a mystical sense, to the Church). By remaining celibate and devoting themselves to the service of the Church, priests more closely model, configure themselves to, and consecrate themselves to Christ.

In addition, a priest's first priority as a servant of the faith must be the needs of his parish. As a result, a married priest would have to make the needs of his wife and family secondary to those of who he is serving. This can cause significant stress in a marriage that can be difficult to navigate to say the least and would require a priest's family to make significant sacrifices.

All that said there are priests in the Latin rite of the Church that are both married and have children. In some instances a married man whose wife has passed will be called to the priesthood later in life and hence you can find priests who have grown children. In addition, there are some former Protestant ministers of certain ecclesial communities (Christina denominations) who were married and subsequently converted to Catholicism that have become Catholic priests. As a result of a policy change made by Pope John Paul II in 1980, a path was offered for married Episcopal priests to continue their ministry after converting to Catholicism. As a result, we have a number of married priests (most with children) that have come to us from the Episcopal and Anglican ecclesial communities.

## WEEK of 12/11/22

**Q: I went to see Our Lady's statue and received the brown scapulars. I was trying to follow along how it works. But I was getting a little confused. Did he say we had to wear at the moment of our death in order to receive Our Lady's promise? That makes me want to wear it everyday - we never know when that day is coming! also were there other 'terms' that came with her promise? thanks!**

A: In order to receive the promise, the Scapular must always be worn (can take it off while bathing and a worn out scapular can be replaced). We must understand that by wearing the Scapular we show our consecration and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Our Blessed Mother cannot be pleased in any one who out of vanity or fear takes it off whenever it is not convenient to wear it. By wearing it we make an open profession of our faith, confidence, and love of Her.

**Q: You mentioned that those who weren't able to be introduced to God still have an opportunity to go to heaven by following good morals and conscience. So does the same apply for the unbaptized yet they believe or just those who never had the chance to learn? Also what about children who didn't get baptized but are innocent and prayed for?**

A: Anybody, who through no fault of their own was not able to come to an understanding of God's revelation and His desire for us all to be part of His Church can be saved by adhering to the moral code / natural law embedded in all our souls at conception. It's MUCH easier to do so within God's Church as it is the Church that is the vehicle for God to provide supernatural graces that we need to overcome our broken nature. This is done through the Liturgy and Sacraments. That said, some people are able to form their conscience and live according to it without this advantage and God is able to provide them with actual graces outside of the Liturgy and Sacraments. We are bound by the Sacraments, but God is not.

That means that someone who never knew about Christianity or those that have a false understanding of it and hence do not practice it or those who die before having the opportunity to embrace it all can be saved. Again, revelation tells us that the normal way to be saved is through Baptism and the following of Christ, but we believe in God's mercy for those that did not have this opportunity and still managed to live a virtuous life aligned with the natural moral law. This is clearly true for unbaptized young children (anyone below the age of reason) as well.

That said, if someone has come to recognize that the Catholic Church is the Church that Jesus founded and understands that Christ intended that we be part of His Church AND still they refuse to become Catholic that is a different issue (Baptized or Unbaptized). If someone with this knowledge is choosing to stay outside of the Church to accommodate family or friends or simply out of convenience (e.g. they have been going to the same non-Catholic service for years) then there is a problem. That would be a deliberate rejection of Jesus' command / intention and that would put salvation out of reach for them as they are in fact rejecting God.

See CCC 1257-1261

**Q: Could someone who chooses to do good things but simply in an attempt to get to heaven or be recognized as a “good person” be saved by doing so? In other words the only reason they do good deeds for their own good.**

A: That is an interesting question and one that has been debated for 2,000 years. The key is not doing good things, but learning how to love for the good of the other. If your desire to do good things is based purely on selfish desires - that is not love. As a matter of fact - the opposite of love is not hate but selfishness. Our learning how to love should spur us to do good things for others but it is not the good things that get us to heaven. Rather it is accepting God's freely given graces that allows us to learn how to love as He loves that get us to heaven.

Related to this is would be contrition for sins that is based purely on the fear of losing out on heaven and spending eternity in hell. Contrition that is based upon fear of punishment is called imperfect contrition. This is compared to perfect contrition where your sorrow from sins comes from a place of loving God and neighbor and regretting having offended / hurt one or the other. Imperfect contrition is enough when it comes to seeking forgiveness of the guilt of one's sins. God would prefer perfect contrition, but understands that in imperfect contrition the fear is a fear of losing the opportunity to be with God eternally.

See CCC 1451-1454, 1815, 1829, 2044, 2447

**Q: How do we explain to our children why we do not read the King James bible?**

A: There is nothing wrong with reading the King James bible. It is not a great translation of the original texts (translation science has evolved quite a bit since it was created in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), but some find it quite beautiful and edifying. There are a couple of passages that are very poorly translated but for the most part it is representative of the original texts and expresses core Christian beliefs accurately.

That said, it only contains 66 of the 73 books of the complete Bible. It is missing the Old Testament books of Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch (as well as portions of Esther and Daniel). Those books were eliminated by the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers (e.g. Martin Luther) as they contained content that conflicted with their view of Christianity. Catholics read the complete Bible whose contents (the canon) the Church defined in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (at councils of Rome and Hippo) and infallibly declared at the Council of Trent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. That definition and declaration recognized that Jesus and the Apostles most frequently quoted a version of the Bible known as the Greek Septuagint which contained those books. The Church took the position that if Jesus and the Apostles considered it sacred scripture it is sacred scripture and must be included. There were other factors (e.g. early tradition) that led to this definition but that was one of the more important ones.

**Q: Matthew 5:32 (NASB) – “...but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except for the reason of sexual morality makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” What is “sexual morality” mean (in this context) and does the exception clause grant divorce when a spouse commits adultery?**

A: This is a frequently asked question for sure. It has been answered many times. I like this answer from Jimmy Akin = > <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/did-jesus-say-adultery-is-grounds-for-divorce>

**Q: What does the Church teach about what happens to people who kill themselves? Does the Church teach anything in particular about children / teenagers who kill themselves?**

A: There are very clear teachings on this subject found in CCC 2280-2283. The bottom line is that taking one's life is grave matter and it will rise to the level of mortal sin if it is done freely and with full knowledge (the conditions for a sin to be mortal). In that case, it would lead to a separation from God. However, CCC 2282 (which specifically addresses the young) tells us that, "Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide." This means that many who take their own life and are not of sound mind when doing so (some would argue that means everyone), are not fully culpable. While the act is still grave the sin may not be mortal as one would not be completely free in choosing the act. At the same time, CCC 2283 tells us, "We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives." This means that it is possible that in between the time the decision was made to commit the act and the act was completed the individual may have repented (even though it was too late to reverse the act) by God's grace in which case they may have actually died in God's friendship.

## WEEK of 12/04/22

**Q: Some people who experience sexual abuse find ways to cope with the trauma. Other people find it more difficult, and this leads to alcohol / drug abuse, unhealthy relationships, self-harm, etc.... If a person has no peace because of what they experienced and asks, "Why me?" or "What was the point?". What is the answer to those questions?**

A: This is an example of the classic question of, "The Problem of Evil" – how could an all good, all powerful and all loving God allow evil to occur? This is a question that has been asked for thousands of years and is the subject of the book of the Bible scholars believe was written first – Job The fact that Job was written first illustrates the universal nature of this question and just how long it has remained outside the grasp of man.

There are no answers to this questions that can satisfy us in this life. However, here are six common logical explanations for why God permits evil to occur and those subjected to it to suffer:

1. ***It's a Mystery:*** Our finite and temporally (time based) constrained view of events inhibit our ability to see beyond the here and now. We cannot perceive the long-

term primary and secondary impacts of an event and hence we struggle to see how a greater good can come from an obvious evil. The greater the evil the greater this struggle is. The problem is not with God however, the problem is with our finite nature and capacity to see beyond the here and now.

2. **Greater Good – We Can't See (Right Away):** Parents we can see the greater good of getting their children inoculated against disease. However, at the time, a child only sees that their parents are allowing someone to stick a piece of metal in them. We often see a forest fire as a devastating loss yet it is forest fires that provide the nutrients to heal the soil and room for new growth that allow forests to flourish in future generations.
3. **Benefits of Pain & Suffering:** We learn from pain and suffering. If it was not for pain, we would continue to do things that could lead to our maiming and death. (NOTE: Congenital Insensitivity to Pain and Anhidrosis (CIPA) is a very rare and extremely dangerous condition. People with CIPA cannot feel pain. Pain-sensing nerves in these patients are not properly connected in parts of brain that receive the pain messages.) Without suffering would not learn how to be courageous, perseverant, and thankful for the good. It would also prevent others from exercising the virtues of charity and compassion. The “obstacles” we face in this world can be thought of as workouts that we must endure to strengthen us. We suffer during our workout to achieve our long-term goals.
4. **Freedom & Ability to Love:** If God was to constantly intervene to prevent/counteract evil, we would no longer need to take the leap of faith to believe in God. However, that would also mean our free will would be compromised – we would have no choice but to believe in God. Without free will, we cannot make the choice to love God and each other. We would be compelled to “love” out of fear.
5. **Death is Not the End:** We can easily forget that this life is a short apprenticeship meant only to give us the opportunity to exercise our love muscles and learn how to love God and neighbor as God loves us – unconditionally. We see death as tragic when in reality, for those that die in God’s friendship, it is the ultimate reward. We want to escape the restrictions of this life to enjoy the life we were meant to live in eternity. Death is not the end – it is the beginning of our real lives.
6. **God Can Bring Good Out of Evil:** We have to remember that God can bring good out of anything. By preserving our free will God facilitates true love. However even the greatest of evil acts (e.g., the brutal murder of Jesus) can be used to spur great goods – Christianity created the hospital and university systems that have led to so much good for example. When we see great evils (e.g., genocide or in this case sexual abuse) we need to have the confidence that ultimately God will bring about an even greater good and that God is more than capable of compensation the victims of great evil in eternity.

Some bible verses / quotes that address this subject that may be of comfort:

- Romans 8:28: “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

- Romans 5:35: “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer man is wasting away, our inner man is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”
- “The possibility, not the necessity, of moral evil, of wars and social injustices that follow them, is the price we have to pay for the greatest good we possess – the gift of freedom. God could, of course, at any moment stop a war, but only at a terrible cost – the destruction of human freedom.” Fulton Sheen

The Catechism teaching on this subject is useful: CCC 311 - Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus, moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it: For almighty God ..., because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself.

**Q: Is Judas in Hell?**

A: We can not know for sure as we do not know if at the last moments of his life if he repented of his sins (including the sin of suicide). That said we have some indications from Matthew’s Gospel when Jesus, speaking of his betrayer – Judas – says, “...it would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” (MT 26:24). However, there are some other indicators that perhaps he was indeed repentant – you can read about those here => <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/is-judas-in-hell> The bottom line is that there is no sin that God can not forgive if one repents, so we will not know for sure until the end of time when all is revealed to us.

**Q: Protestant criticize that plenary indulgences minimizes or denies Christ’s sufficiency and payment of sin on the cross. How would you respond to that?**

A: This is a result of the misunderstanding of a number of core Christian teachings including: 1) the communion of Saints, 2) purgatory, 3) the difference between forgiveness and justice, and 4) what indulgences actually are / draw upon. Keep in mind that for 1500 years there was one Christian approach to all of these subjects and that was the Catholic approach. The Protestant approach evolved in the 1500s and today there is no one single Protestant approach to any of these topics as Protestantism covers a wide spectrum of beliefs specific to each of the thousands of protestant denominations that have evolved. That said, Catholics believe that it is what Christ did

on the cross that suffices to forgive our sins (when we repent from them) and that it is that it is that same treasury upon which indulgences that relive temporal punishment due to sin (in the name of justice). In other words, Catholics would agree that what Christ did was sufficient and is what we rely upon 100% for our salvation.

That said, we do not have an assurance of salvation simply through Faith Alone as many Protestants believe. We believe we must seek forgiveness for our sins and that we can indeed lose our salvation if we separate ourselves from God through mortal sin. We also believe that God is a God of both mercy and justice. While God freely offers His mercy and forgives our sins through the merits of Christ, we must ask for it – Confession. We also believe that Christ wants us to make amends for our sins (e.g., if I steal \$100, the person I stole it from can forgive me, but I must still make reparation for the theft). Sins against God (all sins essentially) require that reparations be made as well. When Jesus gave Peter and the Apostles the ability to bind and loose (Matthew 16 & 18) that authorized them to define acts of mercy and charity that could be used to make reparations. That is what an indulgence – plenary or partial – is. This reparation once again draws upon the merits of Christ just as forgiveness of the guilt of the sin does to turn of small act of mercy or charity (Spiritual or Corporal) that we may performed into an efficacious reparation.

**Q: Why don't the church do the blood of Christ with wine anymore and it's only just the body of Christ as it because of COVID?**

A: The practice of receiving the body and blood of Christ under both species - bread and wine - has long been the norm in the Eastern Catholic Churches (the 23 other Church that are in full communion with the Pope and the Latin Church). It was not the norm in the Latin rite but has, from time to time, been offered at the discretion of the local Bishop. In many dioceses in the United States, it had in effect become a norm pre-Covid. However, Covid made it impractical. Even without the threat of serious disease it is risky as the handing back and forth of the cup is ripe for the opportunity of "Spilling Christ" and even outside a pandemic sharing a cup opens one up to sickness.

The Church has always taught that, "...Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace (and) for pastoral reasons this manner of receiving communion has been legitimately established as the most common form in the Latin rite." (SEE CCC 1390) The bottom line is that we believe the body, blood, soul and divinity is completely present under each species so receiving under one species - the bread - is receiving the fullness of Christ.

The reception of Jesus via the cup may return at some point. That is a decision each individual Bishop is able to make.



## WEEK of 11/27/22 – WE TOOK THE WEEK OFF

### Week of 11/20/22

#### **Q: Why did we follow the lineage of only one of Abraham's son? Confirm which one ?**

A: Abraham – the Father of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic faiths – had two sons we are aware of through the biblical record. Abraham (formerly Abram) and his wife Sarah (formerly Sarai) were originally from the land of Ur. They were called out of Haran to which they had travelled from Ur by God to the land of Canaan (see Gen 12). Abraham and Sarah were advanced in years and had no children but God promised that Abraham would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky (see Gen 15).

Sarah had an Egyptian maid named Hagar and since she had bore Abraham no children (and she doubted God's promise) she asked Abraham to have children through Hagar. Hagar bore Abraham a son named Ishmael when Abraham was 86 years old. Yet, God reiterated his promise to Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son that was to be named Isaac and that it would be Isaac that God would make the Father of the 12 tribes of Israel and with whom God would establish a covenant (see GEN 17:15-21).

Sarah conceived a son when Abraham was 100 years old (see Gen 21) and asked Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ismael. Abraham did not want to do it but God reiterated that it is through Isaac that Abraham's descendants will be named (see Gen 21:9-12). At the same time, God promised that he would indeed also make a great nation of Ishmael since he was Abraham's son (see Gen 21:13). It is from Ishmael that the Arab nations descended.

So... we follow the lineage of Isaac only as that was God's command. Ishmael (and his mother Hagar) were taken care of by God and flourished, building a nation of their own. However, God had promised that it would be Abraham and Sarah that would be the parents of His chosen people. Despite, Sarah's doubts (you can read about them again in Gen 18), God fulfilled His promise.

#### **Q: What is the origin of the rosary / what are the basis for it in the deposit of faith?**

A: The rosary is one of the most cherished prayers of our Catholic Church. Introduced by the Creed, the Our Father, three Hail Marys and the Doxology ("Glory Be"), and concluded with the Salve Regina, the rosary involves the recitation of five decades consisting of the Our Father, 10 Hail Marys and the Doxology. During this recitation, the individual meditates on the saving mysteries of our Lord's life and the faithful witness of our Blessed Mother.

Journeying through the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries of the rosary, the individual brings to mind our Lord's incarnation, His passion and death and His resurrection from the dead. In so doing, the rosary assists us in growing in a deeper appreciation of these mysteries, in uniting our life more closely to our Lord and in imploring His graced assistance to live the faith. We also ask for the prayers of our Blessed Mother, who leads all believers to her Son.

In 2002 Pope Saint John Paul II added the Luminous Mysteries to the rosary, and in his apostolic letter, "Rosarium Virginis Mariae," explained the fittingness of these "mysteries of light" as follows:

*"Moving on from the infancy and the hidden life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, our contemplation brings us to those mysteries which may be called in a special way "mysteries of light". Certainly the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the "light of the world" (Jn 8:12). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of his public life, when he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. In proposing to the Christian community five significant moments – "luminous" mysteries – during this phase of Christ's life, I think that the following can be fittingly singled out: (1) his Baptism in the Jordan, (2) his self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana, (3) his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with his call to conversion, (4) his Transfiguration, and finally, (5) his institution of the Eucharist, as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery."*

The origins of the rosary are "sketchy" at best. Tradition holds that St. Dominic (d. 1221) devised the rosary as we know it. Moved by a vision of our Blessed Mother, he preached the use of the rosary in his missionary work among the Albigensians, who had denied the mystery of Christ. Some scholars take exception to St. Dominic's role in forming the rosary. The earliest accounts of his life do not mention it, the Dominican constitutions do not link him with it and contemporaneous portraits do not include it as a symbol to identify the saint.

The use of "prayer beads" and the repeated recitation of prayers to aid in meditation stem from the earliest days of the Church and has roots in pre-Christian times. In the first few centuries of the Church mendicant Egyptian monks developed the practice of reciting the 150 Psalms daily. Others tried to imitate the monks, but since most people were illiterate reciting the 150 psalms was simply not possible. Instead, followers would pray 150 Our fathers using beads to keep count. Evidence exists from the Middle Ages that strings of beads were used to count Our Fathers and Hail Marys. Actually, these strings of beads became known as "Paternosters," the Latin for "Our Father."

The structure of the rosary gradually evolved between the 12th and 15th centuries. Eventually 50 Hail Marys were recited and linked with verses of psalms or other phrases evoking the lives of Jesus and Mary. During this time, this prayer form became known as the rosarium ("rose garden"), actually a common term to designate a collection of similar material, such as an anthology of stories on the same subject or theme. During the 16th century, the structure of the five-decade rosary based on the three sets of mysteries prevailed.

In 1922, Dom Louis Cougand stated, "The various elements which enter into the composition of that Catholic devotion commonly called the rosary are the product of a long and gradual development which began before St. Dominic's time, which continued without his having any share in it, and which only attained its final shape several centuries after his death." However, other scholars would rebut that St. Dominic not so much "invented" the rosary as he preached its use to convert sinners and those who had strayed from the faith. Moreover, at least a dozen popes have mentioned St. Dominic's connection with the rosary, sanctioning his role as at least a "pious belief."

The rosary gained greater popularity in the 1500s, when Moslem Turks were ravaging Eastern Europe. Recall that in 1453, Constantinople had fallen to the Moslems, leaving the Balkans and Hungary open to conquest. With Moslems raiding even the coast of Italy, the control of the Mediterranean was now at stake. In 1571, Pope Pius V organized a fleet under the command of Don Juan of Austria the half-brother of King Philip II of Spain. While preparations were underway, the Holy Father asked all of the faithful to say the rosary and implore our Blessed Mother's prayers, under the title Our Lady of Victory, that our Lord would grant victory to the Christians. Although the Moslem fleet outnumbered that of the Christians in both vessels and sailors, the forces were ready to meet in battle. The Christian flagship flew a blue banner depicting Christ crucified. On October 7, 1571, the Moslems were defeated at the Battle of Lepanto. The following year, Pope St. Pius V established the Feast of the Holy Rosary on October 7, where the faithful would not only remember this victory, but also give thanks to the Lord for all of His benefits and remember the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother.

The fact that our Church continues to include the Feast of the Holy Rosary on the liturgical calendar testifies to the importance and goodness of this form of prayer. Archbishop Fulton Sheen said, "The rosary is the book of the blind, where souls see and there enact the greatest drama of love the world has ever known; it is the book of the simple, which initiates them into mysteries and knowledge more satisfying than the education of other men; it is the book of the aged, whose eyes close upon the shadow of this world, and open on the substance of the next. The power of the rosary is beyond description."

**Q: What in our faith supports the Catholic tradition of petitioning saints in prayer?**

A: See CCC 946-962 as the Catechism does a great job explaining the Communion of Saints that we profess in our creeds. Part of the understanding of that communion of those on earth (Church Militant), those in Purgatory (Church Suffering) and those already in heaven (Church Triumphant) means that we remain connected and death does not separate us. CCC 956 explicitly explains the intercession of the Saints as follows:

*The intercession of the saints. "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness. . . . They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus. . . . So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped.*

We believe that all who have been redeemed by Christ, whether living on earth or having died in God's friendship are part of Christ's Mystical Body. Since we believe in the immortality of the soul, those that physically die on this earth remain alive in the next life and those that die in God's friendship are in heaven "rooting" for us to make it there as well. We read about this in the letter to the Hebrews which states, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

We also believe that we should, "...pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful." (James 5:16) There are no humans that are more

righteous than those in heaven with God. As a result, we believe that there is great power in the Saints praying for us. We pray for each other on earth and ask the Saints who are in God's presence to do the same.

**Q: I've always wondered how come every time I am at Mass or at a something related to God I always tear and cry ...I always feel something in me but I can't explain it.**

A: It is not uncommon for people to feel intense emotions during liturgical celebrations. The real question isn't why you are emotional but rather why so few people are affected in this way. During our Mass we encounter our living God and confront his mercy in the face of our own brokenness. It should evoke emotions of all types. The fact that you are experiencing those emotions could be your soul's reaction to what you are participating in. If this reaction is troubling you, you might want to consider making an appointment with one of our Priests to discuss it.

**Q: My Mom grew up in Mexico and a devout Catholic all her life up until about ten years ago. She is now Christian (Protestant) like my brother who converted her. Is it Ok to let my children go to a Protestant church service with them? How do I reconcile if my daughters in the future become Protestant?**

A: Let's start off with the easy part. While there is nothing wrong with a Catholic attending a service of another Christian denomination that can only be done if they fulfill their obligation to participate in a Sunday Catholic Mass. The service of another ecclesial community can never substitute for Mass. That said, only those that are strong in their Catholic faith should consider attending a non-Catholic service with friends and family. Children do not possess that type of strength so allowing them to attend puts their faith at risk. I would recommend against it. You want to do everything you can to keep your daughters in Christ's Church where He wants them to be.

Now for the harder part. Former Catholics that have knowingly left the Church that Christ established are putting their souls at risk. You should find out why your brother and your mother have left the Church. If they understand that the Catholic Church is the Church Christ founded and they have left the Church anyway their salvation is in grave jeopardy. If they left the Church because of a lack of understanding or a misunderstanding of Church teaching that can minimize their culpability. In that case, you would still want them to return to the Church as it is Christ's Church, and it is where the fullness of Christian teachings and graces are found. Leaving the Church for another ecclesial community is like deciding to play tackle football but choosing to do so without pads.

I would be interested to hear what their reasons for leaving are. If you like, I would be happy to meet them for coffee somewhere to discuss it. If they take their salvation seriously, they should have no trouble with such a meeting as that would mean they want to understand the truth first and foremost. Most people that leave the faith for another Christian ecclesial community do so because they do not truly understand the faith or have been fed misinformation about the Church. Usually, the error of that decision can be logically pointed out by just getting to understand why they made the decision and helping them see where their misunderstandings have led them astray.

**Q: Homosexual actions are sinful. So, is simply indulging or saying yes to the thought of sin? When, if a man is homosexual, does the man commit sin? When he comes across an attractive man? When he looks at that man's body or face in admiration? When he thinks about that man's appearance in awe or when he physically turns his head back at the man as he continues walking? If so, when is the sin venial and when is it mortal. When is admiring beauty sinful for homosexuals?**

A: All of these questions could apply to a heterosexual as well as a homosexual. All sexual sins – the inappropriate use of one's sexual powers inside or outside of sacramental marriage (Note: There are certain sexual acts that even when pursued within a Sacramental marriage are sinful. These are acts that require the misuse of our sexual or other bodily organs, acts that are closed to procreation or acts that do not support the unity of spouses.) are mortal sins. We are all called to a life of chastity – the right use of our sexual powers based upon our state in life and chosen vocation (see CCC 2337-2356). Anyone who forgoes chastity is equally guilty of a mortal sin. There are no sexual sins that are less sinful than others or more sinful than others.

While homosexual actions are sinful (see CCC 2357-2359) someone experiencing same sex attraction in and of itself is not sinful. It is no different than a man who finds himself attracted to his neighbor's wife. If that man refrains from acting on that attraction and does not entertain thoughts of his neighbor's wife when they come into his head, he is not sinning. However, if that man allows thoughts of his neighbor's wife to develop and persist that is a problem. As Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:27-28 allowing those thoughts to persist / develop, or actively pursuing them, is sinful.

Appreciating beauty is not a sin. God is the author of beauty (see CCC 2129). We will be instinctually attracted to beauty. Glancing at a beautiful man or woman is not a sin (regardless of whether you are a man or a woman). However, when that glance transitions into sexual thoughts that is when it begins to cross the line into sin. If one allows such thoughts to continue and / or pursues them (actively calls them to mind) the line of mortal sin has been crossed. We are not held accountable for instinctual glances and appreciating beauty in all its forms is perfectly fine. It is when we begin to objectify other humans and pursue sexual thoughts for our own gratification that we are sinning – it's both a misuse of our sexual powers and a violation of the dignity of another beloved son or daughter of God.

## Week of 11/06/22

**Q: In the Creed what do they mean (when it says), "he rose again from the dead."**

A: There is a line in both the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds that you may be referring. In the Apostles Creed it reads, "On the third day He rose again." In the Nicene Creed it reads, "On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures." The word "again" in this context means once more. Jesus was alive. Then he died. Then he was alive again. Think of it as saying "he returned to life again. The Creeds affirm Jesus' Resurrection. The word resurrect means to bring to life again.

**Q: How can we love the loving God from the New Testament when He wasn't so loving in the Old Testament (i.e. Floods, Plagues)?**

A: This is a question that has been asked for 2,000 years and is a good one. As a matter of fact, some early Christians had so much trouble reconciling the God of the New Testament with the God of the Old Testament that there were heresies that claimed there were two Gods (e.g. Marcionism).

There are a few things you need to keep in mind:

- 1) God is a loving Father and ALL parents must sometimes discipline their children when they go off the rails. As children grow and mature (as humanity did – moving from a childlike but barbaric state to a more adolescent emotionally more mature state) the type of punishment changes and the need for / effectiveness of corporal punishment disappears. Early humanity was only capable of understanding very direct and corporal punishment.
- 2) The writers of Sacred Scripture often convey truths about God by attributing human traits, emotions, or intentions to God - an innate tendency of human psychology – to help the hearer/reader more easily understand. This is called anthropomorphism. The truth is that God was disturbed by those people that engaged in things like child sacrifice or other violations of the dignity of life. The human reaction to injustice is one of violent retribution and the writers attributed that reaction to God. While God is indeed both a God of Mercy and a God of Justice, much of what you read in the Old Testament is the result of hyperbole (a staple of Jewish writing) and anthropomorphism. We often read about how the Jewish people utterly slaughtered the people of Canaan with God's divine assistance, yet those very same peoples show up just chapters later. (It's a lot like how we talk about our favorite sports team crushing the competition).
- 3) All that said, God is the author of life and it is a gift he freely gives. It is not owed to us and we did nothing to deserve it. We can't take the life of another human creature because we did not create it. God can choose to end our lives at any time if He believes a greater good can come from that. We must keep in mind that this life is not what we were created for – we were created for life with God and there are clear cases where God ends the life of innocents before they can be corrupted. The early termination of life here means they will join Him in heaven – our ultimate goal – which is a far greater good.

Since you mentioned the flood, I do want to address that. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are thought to be allegorical (presenting fundamental truths but not historical fact) – see CCC 337, 362, 375, 396, etc... While there is a great deal of evidence regarding highly destructive localized floods in the middle east which would have appeared to the people there as being “worldwide” there is no evidence of a global flood. The message of the flood is that mankind had degenerated into a violent and immoral state and God allowed these floods to occur to provide a means for humanity to restart (the waters of the flood were a source of rebirth for ancient humanity just as the waters of Baptism are the source of spiritual rebirth for us).

I also want to address the ten plagues. Each of the plagues was a direct attack on the power of one of the Egyptian Gods. God was demonstrating that those Gods were powerless and that there was only one true God. He needed to demonstrate this not only to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelite people but to re-teach the Israelite people about Himself. The Israelite people had basically become culturally and religiously Egyptian over the course of their 400+ years of slavery in Egypt.

The bottom line is that there are several reasons why you see the God of the Old Testament behaving as if angry or malicious – humanity was barbaric and needed to be communicated with in a way it could understand, writers were using anthropomorphic language and symbols to depict fundamental truth (again so readers/hearers could more easily understand), we need to be clear on the genre the various books and sections within them are written in, and we need to recognize that God is the author of life and can choose to take the gift away at any point.

This article / Podcast will cover these and other reasons why God is often displayed as a barbaric maniac in the Old Testament => <https://www.catholic.com/audio/caf/is-the-biblical-god-a-maniac>

**Q: If War causes a lot of innocent deaths, why do we approve of it, or do we?**

A: You can read about the teaching of the Church on War – known as just war theory – in Catechism paragraphs 2302-2317. The Church does not condone entering into war as an aggressor under any circumstances. The Church does recognize right of a country/government to legitimately defend its people and interests (CCC 2308). However, the conditions under which this is allowed are very specific and narrow. They are outlined in CCC 2309 as follows:

“The strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the "just war" doctrine. The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.”

The bottom line is that very few “military actions” / “wars” of our age (or any age) would meet these requirements. Even within those wars that may meet the criteria (e.g. U.S. entry into WW II) there are actions that were taken (e.g. The U.S. dropping of the Atomic Bomb) that would violate the conditions of just war as defined by the Church and would be condemned (and were in the case of the use of the atomic Bomb) by the Church.

**Q: Jesus said, “judge not and you won’t be judged...” and also said, “judge not by appearances but with righteous judgement.” What do these mean, then explain how it is consistent with how the Church can know the holy state of a soul after death by canonization as a Priest judging (the) heart of the penitent during confession if that happens.**

A: In the first case I believe you are referencing Luke 6:37 and Matthew 7:1 – these are parallel passages. In the second case I believe you are referring to John 7:24.

In the first case I will reference the great commentary from Saint Josemaria Escriva, “Jesus is condemning any rash judgments we make maliciously or carelessly about our brothers’ behavior or feelings or motives. ‘Think badly and you will not be far wrong’ is completely at odds with Jesus’ teaching. In speaking of Christian charity St Paul lists its main features: ‘Love is patient and kind [...]. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’ (1 Cor 13:4, 5, 7). Therefore, ‘Never think badly of anyone, not even if the words or conduct of the person in question give you good grounds for doing so.’ Let us be slow to judge. Each one sees things from his own point of view, as his mind, with all its limitations, tells him, and through eyes that are often dimmed and clouded by passion.”

Another way of saying what St. Escriva is telling us about these passages is that we can judge the morality of actions but we can never judge what is in one’s heart if it is not shared with us. For example, we may see someone do something that is objectively wrong, but we do not know the conditions under which it was done (e.g. were they being coerced), their intent, or their level of remorse unless all that is shared with us. Therefore, we must be very careful about judging and limit our judgement only to one’s actions and not to one’s culpability or intent.

As for John 7:24 I will once again rely on the great commentary from Saint Josemaria Escriva when he says, “Jesus is justifying the cures he has worked on the sabbath. On that day, for example, he cured the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:1–18), the man with the withered hand (Mt 12:10–13 and par.), the woman who was bent over (Lk 13:10–17), and a man with dropsy (Lk 14:1–6). Our Lord compares his behavior with keeping two apparently opposed precepts of the Law: the sabbath is a day of rest, and yet the obligation of circumcision on the eighth day applies even if that day falls on a sabbath. Clearly, if it is lawful to circumcise on the sabbath, it must be even more so to work a miraculous cure on the sabbath. That is why he asks them to judge rightly and recognize his saving power—to try to grasp the profound significance of the things that he is doing, even if they at first seem to go against the Law.”

As for Canonization...while the life and actions of one being put forward for Sainthood are scrutinized/evaluated/judged that is primarily a search for things that would clearly identify that someone knowingly and willingly acted in contradiction with Christ’s teaching without repentance/contrition – it’s a search for something that would clearly preclude someone from being declared a Saint. If no clear instances of this are found that, in and of itself, is not enough for us to know someone is in heaven (that is what a declaration of Sainthood is) as we do not know their heart or soul – what motivated the behaviors they displayed in life. As a result, the Church normally requires that there are two verified miracles that can be attributed to the intercession of a potential Saint (e.g. someone with incurable cancer is suddenly and miraculously cured after praying for the individual’s intercession) that occur after her/his death. The Church uses this as proof that the individual who was asked to intercede would be in heaven (and hence a Saint) by assuming that a miracle due to the intercession of someone must mean they have direct access to God in heaven as only God has the power to perform miracles.

As for a Priest judging the heart of a penitent that is not what a Priest does. A priest can only judge the actions and the level of contrition verbally expressed by the penitent. If the penitent



says she/he is sorry and will strive to sin no more, the Priest will accept that statement and provide the absolution from Jesus Christ. If the individual was lying that absolution will be void – God knows! If, however, the individual confesses a sin but also indicates she/he has no intention of trying to avoid that sin moving forward that is not contrition; the Priest can withhold absolution because the penitent provided the information that allowed them to do so. For example, if someone is cohabitating and engaging in sexual intercourse with their partner and confesses that sin, but then says she/he has no intention of stopping; the Priest is justified in withholding absolution as the individual is making it clear they are not contrite. Sins we have no intention of trying to avoid can not be forgiven. It is only when we express sorrow and commit to opening ourselves to God's grace to avoid sin that we can be absolved.

## Week of 10/30/22

**Q: With voting no in Prop 1 would that cause havoc in the world would it cause women resorting to back-alley abortions putting more harm on themselves. I personally pass by the clinic at least 2 times a week and I cry and pray each time. I have 4 beautiful healthy children that I am thankful for and pray for each day. Which makes me extremely for prop 1 but still fearful for the women that may not share our same faith can you please give more guidance in this.**

A: This is a great question and one that I think everyone can resonate with. It is also a question that does not need to be answered from the perspective of faith. It can be answered from the perspective of reason alone. No one wants to see a human being suffer and potentially sustain permanent or life-threatening injury. Whether it is fear, desperation, or lack of knowledge that leads someone down this path is irrelevant. We need to prevent the unnecessary suffering and potential killing of pregnant women!

That said, when it comes to abortion we always want to start with the foundational question – Is there ever any justification for taking the life of an innocent and defenseless human being? A civilized society should have laws and support systems in place to support women and families that find themselves in a crisis pregnancy situation. The fact that the richest country in the world does not have adequate systems in place is an embarrassment. Yet, their absence, cannot justify the intrinsic evil of taking the life of an innocent. We should fight to put those systems in place instead of taking the “simple” and less expensive route of killing innocent children and convincing their parents that it is OK.

Once we cross that line of justifying the killing of an innocent human being (especially by its own parent(s)) we can justify killing just about anyone who places a burden on others (the sick, the handicapped, the less intelligent, etc...). All human life is of equal dignity – race, color, creed, sex, ability, size, stage in life, etc... - has no impact on human dignity. If we allow human life to be valued based upon these accidental attributes then we are fostering a Eugenic mindset (NOTE: Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood was a Eugenicist who saw abortion as a means of eradicating the “problem” of minorities and the less able). No one would want to be labeled a Eugenicist today (The world's most famous was Adolph Hitler), but eugenics is indeed what the abortion lobby is pursuing by valuing innocent human life in the womb as inferior to that of an fully grown human.

Consider this... should we prevent homeowners from defending themselves if someone breaks into their homes who could potentially kill them in the process? Robbery is an inherently dangerous activity – we could make an argument that we should not have self defense laws in place as that is dangerous for the robber. We would never do that because we recognize that we all have a right to defend ourselves. Yet, we struggle when it comes to defending the defenseless baby in the womb when that child is perceived as an inconvenience for one or more of the parents. Should we be able to kill anyone that could disrupt our life plans – someone vying for the same scholarship, job, or spouse perhaps?

We need to keep reminding ourselves that 95%+ of the world's biologists agree that human life begins at conception and that the taking of an innocent human life under any condition is rightly called killing. This is not an open question regardless of how many times our "Catholic" president claims it is. Science closed the door on this issue years ago.

As for the tragedy of the back-alley abortions, one of the greatest lies ever told was put forward by those that testified in front of the Supreme Court during the original Roe vs Wade hearings about the number of women that get injured/killed in back-alley abortions each year. The lead doctor who provided the testimony that 10's of thousands of women were dying each year – Dr. Nathanson – has since admitted that he fabricated the data (no one ever checked it). The actual numbers are quite small which is why you don't hear the pro-abortion lobby talk about them anymore – in the range of dozens a year pre-Roe and about the same number today 50 years later. That said, even one is too many, and those individuals that subject women to this (women are victims here) should be punished to fullest extent of the law. They are preying on the desperation of women for financial gain while taking the life of an innocent child and potentially causing permanent physical damage (if not life-threatening damage) to the woman involved. These men and women that do this are butchers not saviors.

The issue is certainly a complicated one and no one should try to claim it's not. However, the complication is not whether or not abortion should be stopped – the killing of innocent and defenseless human beings can never be justified. The complication is self-created in that we do not want to put forth the effort and sacrifice to put the systems in place to provide women (and men) with easily accessible support and options.

The waiting list for a newborn to be adopted is years long. In this country there are more people that want children and can't have them than there are who do not want their children and choose abortion each year. Let's help fix that by introducing programs and laws that support mothers and young families, by holding men financially accountable for their role in creating a life, promoting and simplifying adoption, and prosecuting those that want to continue to make money (abortion is a for profit business) through the intentional killing of innocent and defenseless human beings in the womb.

**Q: Can Church teaching / doctrine change especially in its views of the Jews? A group of Catholics said that Church tradition has constantly taught that Jews are cursed and (Nostre Aetate) simply tells Catholics not to harass Jews about that Doctrine, not that it is something we can't profess.**

A: Let's start with the first part of the question – “Can Church teaching / doctrine change?” The answer is yes and no. There are two types of Church teaching – Infallible and Mutable. Mutable teaching can and does change – not often, but as new information becomes available it does indeed morph as it is the search for truth that is held in the highest regard not anything else. Infallible teaching comes in two forms – Dogma (Divinely Revealed by God) and those teachings deemed infallible as a result of their relationship to Dogma (this is a slight oversimplification to save space). Since God is the source of all truth infallible teaching can not change. Our understanding of it can develop (e.g. the Doctrine of the Trinity developed over several centuries before arriving in its current form) as we grow in understanding and the ability to adequately describe / communicate a divinely revealed truth, BUT the fundamental nature/essence of a infallible teaching can never change.

Now for the questions specific to the Jewish people. The Church has never taught that the Jews were cursed or promoted the associated claim that it was the Jews that murdered Jesus. There have been many Catholics that have claimed this and a long list who at the very least made clearly anti-Semitic claims (e.g. Saint John Chrysostom has a number of homilies that were used by the Nazis as justification for their genocide – even Saints make huge mistakes). While individuals within the Church have failed on this front there has never been a magisterial teaching that aligned with this gross error.

For the first few decades of Christianity the faith was perceived as just another Jewish sect – like the Pharisees, Sadducees or Essenes. Jesus Himself was a devout Jew, all 12 Apostles were Jewish, and one of the reason Christianity spread so quickly was because it was readily adopted by the Jews that had been dispersed throughout the known world as they were conquered in history. Some would say that this was part of God's divine plan of choosing the Jewish people to spread the Good News to all nations.

The Church has always taught that it was the sins of mankind – past, present, and future – that led to Jesus's death. It was indeed the local Jewish Leadership in collaboration with the local Roman government that put Jesus to death but this action should not be confused with Judaism or the Jewish people at large. All Christians can trace their religious ancestors to the Jewish people. This is a good article that you may want to peruse that goes into more detail - <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/it-was-sin-that-killed-the-savior>

Nostra aetate (from Latin: "In our time") is the incipit (first few words) of the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council. It is the shortest of the 16 final documents of the Council and "the first in Catholic history to focus on the relationship that Catholics have with Jews." It would be foolish to interpret it in any other way than it was stated – that the Jewish people hold a special place in God's plan and continue to do so today. As a matter of fact, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – Lumen Gentium – was one of the four major (and hence most authoritative) documents of Vatican II and it states in Paragraph 16, “Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall the people (the Jewish People) to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people **remains most dear to God**, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.”

The bottom line is that official Church teaching on the Jewish people has never substantially changed. We have always considered them our forefathers in faith and recognize that God chose them to be the vehicle through which the rest of the world would come to know who God is and what humanity is destined to be in relation to God.

**Q: My husband told me that we don't have the right to get the Eucharist at Mass because we haven't been married by the Church. Is he right about it? Even though I have my communion done?**

A: Yes. Without the benefit of some additional information your husband is right. I am assuming that you (and / or your husband) were Baptized as a Catholic and were married outside the Church without the permission of the Bishop. All Baptized Catholics are required to be married within the Church in order for the marriage to be valid. You can get a dispensation (permission) from the Bishop to be married elsewhere, but without that, the Church does not consider your marriage valid. As a result, assuming that you are indeed living as married people do, you would be living in a state of continuous mortal sin and no one in that state should present themselves for communion.

The good news is that you could rectify this situation quite simply by having your marriage convalidated in the Church. It can be as simple as you, a Priest and two witnesses or as elaborate as you would like. We often do these ceremonies before and after Masses. All you would have to do is make an appointment with one of our Priests to walk through the situation and collect the necessary paperwork (e.g. sacramental certificates). The convalidation would be preceded by a sacramental confession and, once the ceremony is complete, your marriage would be fully sacramentalized. This can usually be done within a couple of weeks. I would encourage you to take this step. I will do wonders for your soul and your marriage. Inviting Jesus into the marriage can do some amazing things!

## Week of 10/23/22

**Q: Can you ever be forgiven for an abortion? Never baptized when it happened. Another Baptism? Confession?**

A: **YES!** There is nothing we can do to “unson” or “undaughter” ourselves from God while we still live. We can separate ourselves from God because of grave sin, but God's love does not change. God is pure intellect and will (love) – He is unchanging. He continues to provide us with the grace to repent and return to Him right up to the moment we take our last breath on earth. The only “sin” that cannot be forgiven is a failure to believe in or accept God's mercy.

You can only be Baptized once. Baptism cleanses you of original sin, and if you have any personal sin the guilt of that sin is absolved as well. However, personal sins committed after Baptism require absolution either through active participation in the celebration of the Eucharist (Venial Sins) or Sacramental confession (Grave/Mortal Sins)

This does not mean that God does not hold us accountable for our grave sins. Justice demands that temporal punishment is administered either in this life or the next and God will ensure that the price is paid. However, for those that commit grave atrocities but that have true repentance and contrition; God allows them to pay for their sins and live in eternity with Him. (See Luke

15:11-32) We do so by completing spiritual or corporal acts of mercy while in this life or through the purgation process after we die.

The key is just because God offers forgiveness to all does not mean all accept it. It is difficult for one that is a slave to sin to escape that slavery and, if they do not, they will not seek the forgiveness God offers and they will not taste heaven. Jesus came to free us from slavery to sin – even our worst sins. Accept God’s mercy and be free.

God gave us the great Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession/Penance so that we can return to Him when we separate ourselves through grave sin and so that we can forgive ourselves through the process of confronting and letting go of our sin.

**Q: Will we be sad or have emotion when we find out someone we love didn’t go to heaven?**

A: This question has been the subject of much theological speculation for 2,000 years. The prospect of being in heaven without someone dear to us is a troublesome thought. Will everyone in heaven have survivor’s guilt? How heartless, it would seem, to enjoy heaven if people we love dearly are being continually tormented in hell. We would never dream of going on a vacation and having the time of our lives when a close loved one is in the hospital.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that at the Last Judgment “the truth of each man’s relationship with God will be laid bare” (CCC 1039). This means the blessed in heaven will know which of their loved ones are in hell. But this seems to cause a problem. If heaven is a “state of supreme, definitive happiness” (CCC 1024), how can the souls in heaven be happy knowing their loved ones are in hell? It would seem that they couldn’t be happy since, being animated by charity, they would pity the damned, and to pity the damned is to partake of their unhappiness in some way.

Three truths must be considered: First, since God loves all, He loves our loved ones. He loves them more than we do, since His love surpasses any of which we are capable (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8). Second, some of those God loves will miss heaven—billions of them, far more than will make it (Matthew 7:13–14). Third, God is happy in heaven (“blessed,” 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15). Therefore, we may conclude that in heaven, God can make us happy and wipe away every tear (cf. Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

In heaven, our perspective will change. The old order—former things—will have passed away (Revelation 21:4). OUR PERSPECTIVE OF SIN WILL CHANGE. As sin has affected man physically, it has dulled his perception of absolute holiness. Constantly surrounded by sin, even Christians do not comprehend the magnitude of evil or appreciate how heinous sin is. In a sinless state, we will have a clearer view of the hideous nature of rebellion against God. As a result, sympathetic tolerance of sin will be replaced by a holy repulsion of sin in heaven. Here we think of “good people” who never worship their Creator, refuse to surrender to the Lord Jesus, and practice sin for a lifetime. Jesus said, “There is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17). “There is not a just man upon earth” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). There we will no longer have any illusion that sinners are good without Christ.

It is not the case that any person deserves to go to heaven. Every sinner deserves to go to hell. Jesus said, “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the

name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:18–19). There will be no one in hell who does not deserve to be there; at the same time, there will be no one in heaven who deserves to be there. In heaven, we will not marvel at how good people went to hell but at how bad people (albeit forgiven) got into heaven.

OUR PERSPECTIVE OF JUSTICE WILL CHANGE. Every time God renders a judgment of come or go, it will be the right decision (Matthew 25:31–33; Genesis 18:25). No one will second guess the One who knows all, loves all, and did all to make salvation possible. All angels, saints, and martyrs will praise His judgment on that day. John wrote, “After these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments” (Revelation 19:1–2). God’s righteousness will be vindicated (John 5:22–29; Romans 2:5–16; 12:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9; Revelation 6:9–11; 18:1–19:3; 20:11–15).

We will nod in approval at God’s decisions, even in cases of those we knew and loved on earth. Consider three illustrations that show we already sometimes do this on earth. Imagine a young man lands a good job. His parents are pleased. But they notice after a few weeks that he is late to work a couple of times a week. They encourage him to do better, lest he be fired. Then they hear that he laid out one Friday to go fishing with his friends. They talk strongly to him about his priorities. Nonetheless, he continues his careless habits. His employer is patient but eventually lets him go. The parents are not angry with the employer; they support the just decision (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

OUR PERSPECTIVE OF GOD WILL CHANGE. This is what we know: God does not send people to hell. Sin sends people to hell. Rejection of the gospel sends sinners to hell. God wants absolutely no one to go to hell (Ezekiel 18:23; 18:32; John 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; 2 Peter 3:9). **He wants that so much that He was willing for Jesus to be beaten, mocked, and hanged on a cross.** Jesus, the appointed Judge, wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and still pleads for all to come to Him (Matthew 11:28–30). In some fashion, God gives everyone an opportunity to be saved (Romans 1:18–2:16). “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7:17).

Our perspective on liberty will change. In view of all this, who could suggest that God is unrighteous for punishing unrepentant sinners? Justice demands punishment; someone must pay for every person’s sins. Either a sinner lets Jesus pay for his sins, or God lets the sinner pay for them himself in hell. C. S. Lewis wrote, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell, choose it.”

We might be tempted to say to one we love, “I don’t want heaven if you are not there.” That might sound like love, but it is idolatry. Essentially, it says, “You are my god. I would rather have you than the true God.” Jesus warned us not to love our loved ones more than we love Him (Matthew 10:37). God is the greatest conceivable Good; therefore, keeping our families but losing Him would be evil. Sadly, if a family member rejects the gospel, then he chooses to separate himself from Christian family members in eternity. God honors man’s autonomy by

giving him complete discretion over his destiny. God gives people freedom to follow Him in life and live with Him in eternity. He also gives them freedom from His rules in life and from Himself in eternity.

Our limited human perspective cannot conceive an awesome heaven without our loved ones, but once we are in heaven, God will make all clear to us. An eternity of worship may sound boring now because we are thinking of human physical activity, but such thinking makes heaven about us. Heaven is not primarily about our happiness, it is about God. Our primary focus will be God's glory, not expectations of human happiness. We cannot fully understand heaven until we get there, but we know it will surpass all human expectations because God has promised complete joy and contentment. Knowing that should motivate us to share the gospel of Christ with family, friends, neighbors—yea, even the whole world. When we do, we understand both our opportunities and limitations. We can pray for the lost, share the gospel with them, and plead with them, but we cannot make the choice for them.

## Week of 10/16/22

### **Q: Were the crusades justified? Which one's were and why? If some were not justified, why not?**

A: The term "justified" is the key to this question. The Church has a teaching on what constitutes a just war. You can find that in CCC 2309 and find that there are a number of conditions required for a military action to be taken. I will leave it to you to apply the teaching found in CCC 2309 to the facts surrounding the Crusades below.

Islam emerged in the first half of the seventh century. From humble beginnings it spread rapidly through the Middle East, Northern Africa and into Europe. "By the middle of the eighth century...at least fifty percent of the world's Christians found themselves under Muslim rule"<sup>1</sup>. The birthplaces of Christianity, the great Christian cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, were all under Islamic control marking the beginning of the near total disappearance of the Church in the East over the next several centuries. The center of Christian power had shifted from the West to the East with movement of the capitol of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople in the fourth century. The rise of Islam effectively reversed that power shift as Rome once again emerged as the center of Christendom.

While Islam was dominating the East, the West was struggling through a different type of oppression. Although, "...by the eleventh century most of Europe was Christian...Europe did not seem like the kingdom of God"<sup>2</sup>. The collapse of centralized authority that had given rise to the feudal system which meant that there was, "constant conflict between Christian princes, and the wars of land hungry nobles caused common folk hardship"<sup>3</sup>. This period of near constant war, "...characterized by ferocity and rapacity, cruelty and injustice"<sup>4</sup>, gave rise to the class of fighting men known as knights. The Church, in an attempt to civilize the culture, "...did not ask the knight to give up war altogether... (but rather encouraged) ...him to fight to protect the weak and innocent ,...prevent injustice, (and)...defend the Church against her enemies"<sup>5</sup>.

In 1095 representatives of Emperor Alexis of Constantinople, "...appeared at the Council of Piacenza asking for aid from the West against the advancing hordes of Islam"<sup>6</sup>. The East-West Church schism of 1054 did not prevent the Eastern Emperor from asking the West for aid and, in

this request, Pope Urban saw an opportunity to simultaneously put an end to Christian on Christian war in the West and heal the East-West Church schism. Pope Urban would take advantage of these circumstances by leveraging the newfound chivalry of the knights later in 1095 as he made, "...an eloquent appeal for a great pilgrimage to recover the Holy Places from the infidels"<sup>7</sup>, at the council of Clermont. The idealistic appeal was highly successful as the response, "'Deus vult! Deus vult! (God will it!) ...became the battle cry of the crusades"<sup>8</sup>.

This first crusade started with an assembly of the Christian army at Constantinople in 1096. Nicaea was retaken in 1097, followed by Antioch in 1098 and the ultimate prize, Jerusalem in 1099. However, while strategic cities within the Holy Land were once again under Christian control it was not to be a long-lived occupation and the East-West schism was exasperated by the, "...expulsion of the Greek Patriarch in Antioch"<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, "the Crusaders indiscriminately murdered...innocent people when they captured Jerusalem"<sup>10</sup>, and, "...the lessons the Crusaders learned in warfare became part of their strategies for future wars, waged against other Christians"<sup>11</sup>. On the positive side, beyond the short-term securing of the Holy Land and eventual treaties ensuring the safety of Christian pilgrims for centuries, the Crusades had a unifying effect on Christendom that helped it move beyond feudalism. Meanwhile, this contact with the East, "...exercised an enormous influence in the intellectual life in Europe, (ushering in) ...the golden age of medieval art, philosophy and literature"<sup>12</sup>.

While many of the Crusaders were motivated by high ideals and the opportunity to serve the Lord, there is no doubt that others were more interested in the possibility of economic gain and other less than altruistic goals. While the first crusade certainly had its successes, those victories came at steep price and the subsequent crusades failed to achieve that same level of benefit. "Most would agree that these Crusades fell short of their intended goals"<sup>13</sup>, and did much to damage Christianity's moral standing, "...as the leaders of subsequent Crusades increasingly went crusading for unholy motives"<sup>14</sup>. When viewed from the perspective of this side of history it is easy to see both the positives and negatives of the crusades, but there is no doubt that their initial motivations were defensible even if their ends cannot justify their means.

1 *"The First Thousand Years – A Global History of Christianity"*; Wilken, Robert Louis; pg. 358

2 *"The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History"*; Curtis, Kenneth A., Lang, Stephen J., Petersen, Randy; pg. 73

3 *IBID*; pg. 73

4 *"Church History"*; Laux, Fr. John; pg. 311

5 *IBID*; pg. 311-312

6 *IBID*; pg. 313

7 *IBID*; pg. 313

8 *IBID*; Curtis, Kenneth A., Lang, Stephen J., Petersen, Randy; pg. 73

9 *"The Compact History of the Catholic Church"*; Schreck, Alan, pg. 51

10 *IBID*; pg. 51

11 *IBID*; Curtis, Kenneth A., Lang, Stephen J., Petersen, Randy; pg. 74

12 *IBID*, Laux, Fr. John; pg. 316

13 *IBID*; Schreck, Alan, pg. 51

14 *IBID*; Schreck, Alan, pg. 52

**Q: Is singing and dancing to Christian Rock done in non-denominational Churches actual worship?**



A: Let's start with what Worship means in a Catholic sense. The Catechism defines worship as, "Adoration and honor given to God, which is the first act of the virtue of religion (CCC 2096). Public worship is given to God in the (Catholic) Church by the celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ in the Liturgy (CCC 1067)." So, while in the Catholic Church our primary form of Worship is the Liturgy (the Mass), it is not the only means one can use to adore God and give Him the honor He is due. For those that use music and dancing to praise God they are mimicking one of the ways King David adored God as seen in 2 Samuel 6:14. So, in that sense, it is a perfectly acceptable form of worship. It may not be the fullest sense as we know it, but as we read in Ecclesiastes there is a "time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). The bottom line is that the most perfect form of Worship is the form that was defined by Jesus Himself at the Last Supper and which He first celebrated on the Road to Emmaus but if music and dancing is a way you can demonstrate your love of God go for it.

**Q: How can we simplify the teachings?**

A: That is a tough one as that will mean different things to different people. Fortunately, we have a great model in Jesus Himself who taught uneducated fishermen, farmers, and tradespeople the deepest elements of our faith through the use of storytelling (e.g. parables), accompaniment (time), providing a living example, and gradually uncovering deeper elements of the truth. Too often, people find the teachings of our faith complex because they do not give them enough time, try to take them all in at once, work with teachers that do not know how to tell a story, or don't have a community of faith with which to walk to gain that gradual understanding and deepening of the relationship with God.

Our faith is deep, but not complex. There are mysterious elements that we will struggle to comprehend, but the majority of it is quite simple. There is, however, a great deal to it and much has been written about it over the course of its 2,000 year history so it can seem overwhelming. The key is to take it in slowly as you are ready and to practice it with a wide variety of people who are at different stages of the faith journey who can help witness to the faith and share it effectively. Jesus spent 3 years, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with His Apostles teaching them. They all eventually got it, but it takes time, patience and persistence to dig into deeply.

**Q: I've heard that in God's eyes all of our sins have equal weight. Even though some sins sound worse than others to us. Is that true?**

A: Clearly that is not aligned with Church teaching which recognizes sins that can damage one's relationship with God – venial Sins – and sins that can separate us from God – mortal sins (see CCC 1852-1864). However, in a sense, God does hate all sin and the differing effects of venial and mortal sin are their effects in us not Him. That said, the Church has always taught that there is a hierarchy of sins and we point to the ordering of the Ten Commandments as an example of the hierarchy in written form with Sins against God being the most grave. In addition, there is only one sin that justifies automatic excommunication – abortion – as the murder of an innocent and helpless human being by its parents is considered the peak of gravity. The bottom line – all sins are not equal in the effect they can have on us both in this life and the next and while God hates all sins – venial and mortal – He has made it clear that there is a difference in punishment due in the quest for justice and hence they are not all equal.

**Q: What are the origins of Halloween, and do we celebrate it in our faith?**

A: I could write a fairly coherent answer on this one, but in this case a great response already exists on Catholic.com. Check it out here as it is fantastic =>

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/is-halloween-a-pagan-festival>

## Week of 10/09/22

### **Q: What would happen if God killed the devil?**

A: That is an interesting question and all we can do is offer some speculation. First off, God loves all his creatures – even those that have rejected and defied Him. God would rather we continue to live the life we have chosen than to end our lives. God can turn even the greatest rejection in and ultimate greater good over time. That said, if the devil was to be killed some way, he is only one of many fallen angels and it is likely that another fallen angel would simply take his place. (See CCC 391-395 – The Fall of the Angels)

### **Q: My mother told me that only John knew Jesus. The rest of the Apostles: Luke, Mark & Matthew didn't ever meet Him and were like writing fanfiction of our Lord. Any historical to prove they met Jesus?**

A: First off Luke and Mark were not Apostles. They were Gospel writers, but they were not amongst the twelve Apostles that Jesus called to his service. You can read about the call of the 12 Apostles in Matthew 5:18-22, Matthew 9:9, Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 1:16-20 (note: Levi = Matthew), Mark 2:13-14, Mark 4:13-19, Luke 5:1-11, Luke 6:27-28, & Luke 6:12-16. Matthew was the writer of Matthew's Gospel and he was clearly an Apostle that was called by and lived with Jesus so she is incorrect on that front.

Mark is first mentioned by name in Acts 13:25 as a companion of St. Paul and Barnabas – he is known there as John Mark the cousin of Barnabas. We later find out that Mark went with Barnabas when Paul and Barnabas split up in Acts 15:36-40. Mark would later go on to travel with Peter to Rome (see 1 Peter 5) and it is in Rome that Mark wrote his Gospel. Most believe Mark wrote his Gospel at the direction of St. Peter and was likely the first Gospel that was written. Mark is mentioned outside of the Bible by Papius as travelling with Peter and serving as his interpreter. There is also a strong indication that Mark, while not an Apostle, was a disciple of Christ and travelled with him. There is strong evidence to suggest that Mark was an Essene and it was his mother's house that was used as the location for the last supper and early Christian gatherings (see Acts 12). Most historians believe Mark left us a clue to this in Mark 15:51-52 where he wrote himself into the Gospel. So...at the very least Mark was a disciple that travelled with the both of the two most famous Apostles – Peter and Paul – after Jesus' death and resurrection and it was likely that he was a Disciple who did indeed know and live with Jesus.

Luke was a Syrian from Antioch who is mentioned in St. Paul's letters (Colossians 4, 14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4,11) and was likely brought into the Church by St. Paul himself. Luke himself makes it clear that he is a second generation Christian and hence did not meet Jesus and states that his Gospel is an account based upon the testimony of eye witnesses (the Apostles) - see Luke 1:1-4. We also know that Luke wrote the book of Acts as well as his Gospel as he tells us that in Acts. Based upon his writing of Acts it is clear that Luke had direct access to the Apostles and early Church leaders who emerged in the first century after Christ's death and resurrection. Since Luke's Gospel has content that parallels that of Matthew (one of the 12 Apostles) and Mark (one of the Disciples that travelled with Jesus) we can trust that Luke's promise of a historical account is valid.

The bottom line is your mother is incorrect. What I have presented above is what Biblical historians present – both Christian and Secular. There are no reputable sources that would claim otherwise. I would have asked your mother to offer some support for her argument from reliable historical sources – she will have none to share.

Just a final note...St. Paul who authored the most books in the New Testament (at least 10 and perhaps as many as 14 of the 27 books) also never met Jesus in the flesh. Jesus appeared to him in a vision but Paul never met Jesus physically.

**Q: If someone is unfaithful to their husband and ends up having a child outside of the marriage is that a reason for them no longer to be involved in the Church anymore. They used to be part of a Church group and did these things with another Church member.**

A: If we were to eliminate everyone who sinned from the Church, we would have no one left in it. The Church is a hospital for sinners not a sanctuary for saints. Certainly, what this woman and man (not her husband did) was a mortal sin – adultery. The fact that a child was born (a great good) out of that sinful act likely made the act well known to others but that is also no reason to abandon the Church. If the woman and the man with whom she committed adultery were truly contrite and sought absolution through the great Sacrament of reconciliation their mortal sin would be forgiven, they would be returned to a state of sanctifying grace and their relationship with God would be fully restored.

Jesus did not tell the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) that it was over for her. Rather, he offered her compassion, forgiveness and told her to “sin no more.” Jesus also chastised those who were judging her since they themselves were sinners (as we all are). Unfortunately, many Churchgoers will fall into judgement – we can judge acts but we can not judge hearts and souls – only God can do that. We should always be offering our support and love, regardless of what sins each of us fall into.

This woman and man (and the woman’s husband) all need the Church more than ever. The Liturgy and Sacraments are a source of healing, strength, transformation, and unification.

## Week of 10/02/22

**Q: Why can't women be priests?**

A: On May 22, 1994 Pope Saint John Paul II issued his Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* that definitively and infallibly declared that only men can be priests. The Pope’s rationale for this declaration focused around the decision of Christ to choose his Apostles only from among men which has been the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God’s plan for his Church.

In the letter the Pope states, “These men did not in fact receive only a function which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather they were specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself (cf. Mt 10:1, 7-8; 28:16-20; Mk 3:13-16; 16:14-15). The Apostles did the same when they chose fellow workers who would

succeed them in their ministry.(8) Also included in this choice were those who, throughout the time of the Church, would carry on the Apostles' mission of representing Christ the Lord and Redeemer. Furthermore, the fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary (the most revered human person who ever lived), Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe. The presence and the role of women in the life and mission of the Church, although not linked to the ministerial priesthood, remain absolutely necessary and irreplaceable. As the Declaration Inter Insigniores points out, 'the Church desires that Christian women should become fully aware of the greatness of their mission: today their role is of capital importance both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true face of the church.' The New Testament and the whole history of the Church give ample evidence of the presence in the Church of women, true disciples, witnesses to Christ in the family and in society, as well as in total consecration to the service of God and of the Gospel. "By defending the dignity of women and their vocation, the Church has shown honor and gratitude for those women who-faithful to the Gospel-have shared in every age in the apostolic mission of the whole People of God. They are the holy martyrs, virgins and mothers of families, who bravely bore witness to their faith and passed on the Church's faith and tradition by bringing up their children in the spirit of the Gospel."

Just as women have been given the great gift of being the vehicle through which human life is brought into this world – motherhood; certain men (not all) have been called to a life of service as spiritual Fathers and servants of the Body of Christ on earth. (SEE CCC 1577-1580). As in all things God has created a complementarity between men and women that allow His plan to be lived out. Unfortunately, many continue to debate the wisdom of God's plan despite the infallible declaration made by Pope Saint John Paul II - a declaration that can not be overridden or reversed which simply recognizes that the Church is bound by the choice that Jesus Himself made. To do otherwise would be to state that Jesus was wrong or was pressured into his actions by the culture of the time.

**Q: How the Church receives LGBTQ+ people under the vision that we are all made in the image and likeness of God?**

A: To start with it must be clear that having an attraction to others of the same sex is not in itself a sin. It is acting out on that attraction that runs afoul of God's plan. (See CCC 2357-2359). It is no different than any other misuse of our sexual powers that we may be drawn to (See CCC 2351-2356) such as adultery, fornication, masturbation, contraception, etc.... All humans sin – this does not mean we were not made in God's image (we have intellect) and likeness (we have free will). It simply means we are misusing these two great gifts and choosing against God's plan for us. Even when we make this choice God never stops loving us and he continues to offer his grace to allow us to heal, strengthen, transform and unify right up until the point of death when our will are fixed.

The number of people that suffer from this attraction is “not negligible” (CCC 2358). It has always been the case throughout history. The Church is clear that those suffering with same sex attraction, “...must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of discrimination in their regard should be avoided.” (CCC 2358) That said, God was clear about the purpose of the sexual act being a means of procreation (participating in the creation of life) and fostering unity between a husband and a wife. This is NOT SOMETHING THE CHURCH CREATED – THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD! For those that struggle with attractions that are not within the bond of marital union it is a cross to bear that requires one to pray for the grace of God to allow him/her to live a chaste life.

Transgenderism: What Does The Church teach?

Gender Dysphoria is a deeply painful reality and should be treated with compassion. Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. (CCC 2333) Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended amputations, mutilations and sterilizations performed on innocent persons are against the moral law. (CCC 2297) “Male & Female He Created Them” (2019) – Vatican Document that clearly states the Church position.

Transgenderism: What Does Science Tell Us?

For decades, follow-up studies of transgender kids (less than 18 YO) have shown that a substantial majority -- anywhere from 65 to 94 percent -- eventually ceased to identify as transgender. This has led to a movement in major European countries to stop offering these treatments to minors – the US is woefully behind Europe in this now.

Cosmetic surgery and cross-sex hormones don't change biological reality. People who undergo sex-reassignment procedures do not become the opposite sex (as that is defined at the genetic level)—they merely masculinize or feminize their outward appearance. Sex simply cannot be changed as it is determined at the genetic level.

Transgenderism: Other Relevant Facts

In August 2016, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid wrote: “[t]he four best designed and conducted studies that assessed quality of life before and after surgery using validated (albeit non-specific) psychometric studies did not demonstrate clinically significant changes or differences in psychometric test results after [gender reassignment surgery].”

The most thorough follow-up of sex-reassigned people—extending over 30 years and conducted in Sweden (2011), where the culture is strongly supportive of the transgendered—documents their lifelong mental unrest. Ten to 15 years after surgical reassignment, the suicide rate of those who had undergone sex-reassignment surgery rose to 20 times that of comparable peers.

Body integrity dysphoria (BID, also referred to as body integrity identity disorder, amputee identity disorder and xenomelia, formerly called apotemnophilia) is a disorder characterized by a desire to be disabled or having discomfort with being able-bodied beginning in early adolescence and resulting in harmful consequences. People with this condition may refer to themselves as “transabled”. Should we allow people to cut off working arms and legs because

they feel like they should be disabled? Is this any different than mutilation sexual organs for the same reason?

**Q: Is it true that Adam & Eve had children...so all children from then on were born from incest? Very confused with this concept.**

A: We are told that Adam and Eve did indeed have children (Cain and Abel - Genesis 4). We are also told that their son Cain had relations with his wife. What we are not told is who his wife was and where she came from. It is quite possible that there were other humanoids present (not Homo Sapiens) that Cain could have interacted with. There is nothing in the Bible or Science that precludes this. On the other hand, those early generations could have been the result of incestuous relations as God did tell them to be fertile and multiple (GEN 1:28) and could have done what was necessary to allow these relationships to move forward without ill effects. By the third generation it would no longer be incestuous in that event and God would no longer need to provide this protection. All that said, the latest genetic science points to a likelihood that all members of our species of humanoids (Homo Sapiens) did indeed originate from a single female line which would collaborate the biblical account of the creation of homo sapiens.

**Q: When did God make this world?**

A: Science informs us that the universe is ~14 billion of years old and the earth is ~5 billion years old. We believe that god created everything out of nothing and set the development of the world as we know it in process 14 billion years ago. The creation story in Genesis provides a allegorical version of this fundamental truth that aligns with the order of creation using a series of time periods.

**Q: How much is it of my personal business to expect that those who are taking communion and have not gone to confession? (Seems like something missing there) Each person is on his own path and it's hard to not think that those who take communion should be doing confession.**

A: We should all wish that all our brothers and sisters in Christ are adhering to God's will and that if they are in a state of unconfessed mortal sin and separated from God that they are not participating in communion as that is itself a mortal sin – see CCC 1385-1387. That said, we are also taught that while we can judge one's actions as morally good or bad based upon God's laws we CANNOT judge what is in one's heart. Only when someone has manifestly, obstinately and publicly engaged in an action considered grave matter (the material of mortal sin) can we make that type of judgement because the individual himself is making his/her heart known to us.

The bottom line is we need to do a better job teaching people about the incredible damage to their own souls they are doing if receiving the Eucharist in a state of mortal sin. We also need to pray for those that do this that they may gain the understanding necessary to recognize what they are doing by accepting the graces God is undoubtedly giving them to do so.

**Q: Why does the Vatican don't open his libraries to everyone and are very guarded of what they release?**

A: This is a popular misconception that is continued through movie accounts and those in media that fail to actually do the research to discover the facts. The Vatican libraries are opened to

those researchers that petition for access that have the skills and experience to work with the types of ancient (and irreplaceable) documents that are contained there. The only restriction that is placed on the libraries is that personal documents relevant to the living are not released until after that person passes unless that individual explicitly gives their consent. This is the same rule used by the Library of Congress in the United States which also requires those that petition for access to irreplaceable and incredibly valued documents are trained in the proper handling of such documents. The Vatican libraries are opened to credentialed researchers of every race, color, and religious belief.

**Q: Where can we learn more information about Jesus' youth and young adult years?**

A: Unfortunately, the only reliable sources of that information comes from the Gospels and there is simply not much there outside of the initial chapters of Matthew and Luke. There are documents known as the Gnostic Gospels that claim to contain accounts of Jesus' youth, but these documents were written hundreds of years after Jesus' death and are not considered historically reliable. One of the reasons that we do not hear much about Jesus' early life is that the cost of creating documents in the first century was prohibitive so authors wrote only what they thought was absolutely necessary to convey their intended message and would leave out any details that they may have that are not pertinent.

**Q: What is the Catholic Church's position on Zionism. Is Israel the chosen nation? Is the land still promised to the Jews as in the Jews (Israel) is currently ruling on the biblical land due to divine promise? What is the church interpretations of the land of milk and honey, Israel being chosen, and the 30 year old Jewish male virgins (144,000) in revelation prophecies?**

A: Wow. There is a lot there. First off, the Church was founded by Jews and in a sense all Christians are descendants of the Jewish people (at least spiritually). That said, we believe that the Hebrew people were "chosen" to bring God's revelation to the rest of humanity and serve as an example of how to live as children of God. The Jewish people clearly succeeded in the first case as they served as the seeds of Christianity throughout the world. They did not fair as well on the second account as the history of the Jewish people is a never-ending cycle of sin and redemption. We, as the successors to the Jews have continued in that same mode unfortunately.

As for Zionism and the Churches interpretation of revelation I will refer you to these links below which will give you an extensive response that is aligned with Catholic teaching and Theological thought. I will say that there is nothing about the 144,000 mentioned in revelation being 30 year old Jewish male virgins so that is neither biblical or traditional in any way.

Zionism: <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/zionists>

Judaism, The True Israel and the End Times: <https://www.catholic.com/video/judaism-the-true-israel-and-the-end-times>

Pope Benedict XVI on Judaism and Christianity: <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/benedict-on-judaism-and-christianity>



**Q: Why did the devil appear to me? Also, I saw God in an appearance. Why do I have the capability to see what I saw or what does it mean?**

A: There have been many Catholic mystics that have reported seeing visions of the devil, heaven, hell, and God. St. Faustina and St. Padre Pio are two from the last century that both reported this and investigations into their visions have left the Church stating their accounts are worthy of belief.

That said, when one has these types of visionary experiences, they are considered private revelations and no one else is required to believe them – even those that have been judged worthy of belief by the Church. If you are experiencing these types of visions your first step would be to set up an appointment with a Priest to discuss them so that you can be provided some spiritual direction. The priest may bring in others that are especially trained to investigate visions of this nature and discern if there could be natural causes for them and/or help you discern their source and meaning.

I would recommend starting by meeting with a Priest as soon as possible to discuss these visions as even those where you perceive you are seeing God could indeed be from an alternate evil source as an attempt to mislead you. A Priest would get you on the right track to proper discernment of exactly what these visions are and how you can develop a deeper understanding of them.

## Week of 09/25/22

**Q: If God is neither male or female, how is it that we are made in His image and likeness?**

A: We read in Genesis 1:26 that we are created in God's image and likeness. But God is not a material being – He is a spiritual being. God the son later became incarnate and took on a human nature, but God's divine nature does not have any physical aspects. Hence, we do not look like God or have physical attributes that are like God's because he is devoid of physical attributes. We are in His image and likeness in that we were given a portion of His two powers – intellect and will. He has infinite intellect and will which make Him all knowing and all powerful. We have finite intellect and will but this gives us the power to reason and make free will choices. It is what differentiates us from animals who only have instincts to act on. We can use our reason to come to know God and our will to choose things that are not good for us if we like. This is what gives us the ability to sacrifice ourselves for others and demonstrate virtuous behavior that put the good of others before ourselves. You can read more on this in CCC 225, 299, 355-361 NOTE: See CCC 239 for a description of God relative to fatherhood and motherhood.

***Q: A person on Catholic discord(?) said that Catholics should bring back execution for heretics, blasphemers and adulterers. This Catholic said that the adulterous woman was saved just because the Pharisees didn't bring in the male adulterer as required by law. He said that, and I quote: "To make America beautiful we must kill and purge till the blood runs down stream in the streets! Is this encouragement of death acceptable by the Catholic faith? Does he have a point? May you cite me magisterial documents, CCC paragraphs or scripture to respond.***

A: First off anyone can say they are Catholic and portray themselves as reliable interpreters of the faith. This guy is clearly not a reliable or stable source of faith knowledge. This is why we have a magisterium and do not leave interpretation of revelation up to individuals, but we rely on the Magisterium guided by the Holy Spirit to interpret, protect and communicate God's revelations. Be careful what you read and hear on modern media. Make sure you know your source and his/her credentials to speak on any topic.

- God was very clear in the fifth commandment (Thou Shall Not Kill- Exodus 20:13). There is no circumstance under which we may take the life of anyone unless it is in the act of reasonable self-defense. You can read about this in CCC 2268-2269.
- As a matter of fact the Church has even come out against the death penalty (see CCC 2267) as it is clear that we can now reasonably protect the public from violent criminals by incarcerating them indefinitely (or until rehabilitated) so there is no defensible reason for killing anyone outside of self-defense where one is in imminent danger of death.
- Most of the many Jewish "Laws" (like the one concerning killing those who commit adultery) were not given by God but created by man (see Leviticus for the 600+ Mosaic laws that were not given by God). The ten commandments are God's law which were later refined and explained by Jesus Matthew chapter 5.
- The entire fifth Chapter of Matthew's Gospel is clarity on God's law and chapters 6-7 (the remaining elements of the sermon on the mount) give some excellent additional detail including a wonderful passage about judging others (Matthew 7:1-5) (Note: Catholic teaching is we can reasonably judge one's actions as morally good or evil, but that does not mean we can judge the person performing those actions as their culpability could be lessened by circumstance and we are not aware of the level of repentance in their heart – only God knows what is in one's heart.)