

Blue Bucket Questions: 2024

Through 04/22/24

Q: The canon says a child can be baptized if there is hope he or she will be raised in the Catholic Religion, how is this determined. My baby nephew is in a secular environment, aside from a candle of our lady of Guadalupe. My sister (his mom) is a baptized catholic but doesn't agree with the faith and the dad is non religious, not even a baptized catholic. So Can my nephew get baptized.

A: You are referring to [Canon Law](#) and Canon 868 which reads as follows, "For an infant to be baptized licitly: 1) the parents or at least one of them or the person who legitimately takes their place must consent; 2) there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be delayed according to the precepts of particular law after the parents have been advised about the reason." Based upon what you are describing that necessary hope, "... is altogether lacking" in the case of your nephew.

It would be difficult for any Pastor to approve the Baptism of a child in the situation you describe. A child who is baptized without the hope of being formed in the faith is actually in greater spiritual jeopardy than a child that is not baptized. Baptism brings you into the body of Christ and obligates you to meet certain requirements regarding how you live your life. If you have no hope of being prepared for those requirements you are being set-up for failure and no Pastor would allow that.

At the same time, in the situation you describe, it seems unlikely that your sister who doesn't agree with the faith or your brother-in-law who is non-religious would agree to Baptize your nephew anyway. Without their implicit consent there is no possibility of their child being baptized.

Q: In the Tantum Ergo, what ancient document are we talking about that gives way to the new rite? Is it talking about Torah, prophets, and writings giving way to Jesus and his teachings? His new guidance, rite for worship?

A: The Tantum Ergo is composed of two segments of Pange lingua, a Medieval Latin hymn generally attributed to St Thomas Aquinas from the 13th century. There are many different English translations of the Tantum Ergo. Some are more closely aligned with / true to the original Latin than others as translators have made accommodations to a variety of musical / rhyming schemes. The core meaning of the original Latin is usually retained quite well, but the specifics can vary quite a bit. Here are several common translations of the first stanza in use today:

1. Down in adoration falling, Lo! the sacred Host we hail, Lo! o'er ancient forms departing
Newer rites of grace prevail; Faith for all defects supplying, Where the feeble senses fail.
2. Therefore, so great a Sacrament Let us venerate with heads bowed And let the old practice
Give way to the new rite; Let faith provide a supplement For the failure of the senses.
3. Therefore we, before him bending, This great Sacrament revere; Types and shadows have
their ending, For the new rite is here; Faith, our outward sense befriending, Makes the
inward vision clear.

The last one is the Caswall's translation which, according to the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) entry for the [Tantum Ergo](#), "unshackled by rhyme, is nearest" to the original Latin." Very few translations mention "ancient documents" as that would take a substandard and non-contextual translation of the Latin phrase, "Et antiquum Documentum Novo cedat ritui" to result in a reference to "ancient documents."

All that said, the core message of that first stanza is the types and shadows of the Eucharist (e.g., Manna in the desert) found in the Old Testament have been replaced by the real thing – the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It goes on to make it clear that it is only through faith that we can understand this – our physical senses are not capable of perceiving it. All three examples above, while significantly different in their English wording, convey this same message. In the version that you are referencing the use of the reference to "ancient documents" would also be aligned with this message – the Old and incomplete has been replaced with the new and complete.

Q: Is there a problem with the fact that a priest is standing in as a mediator during the liturgy of the Eucharist rather than Jesus being our mediator to the Father?

A: are making an assertion regarding how we view the role of our priests that is not aligned with Catholic Teaching regarding the role of the Priest. Let's review what the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) has to say on the subject starting with [CCC 1548](#), "In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, **it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body**, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts in persona Christi Capitis: **It is the same priest, Christ Jesus, whose sacred person his minister truly represents**. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is truly made like to the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself (virtute ac persona ipsius Christi). Christ is the source of all priesthood: the priest of the old law was a figure of Christ, and **the priest of the new law acts in the person of Christ.**" The Catechism also informs us that relative to the celebration of the Eucharist that, "...Certain members are called by God, in and through the Church, to a special service of the community. These servants are chosen and consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which the Holy Spirit enables them to act in the person of Christ the head, for the service of all the members of the Church. The ordained minister is, as it were, an 'icon' of Christ the priest. Since it is in the Eucharist that the sacrament of the Church is made fully visible, it is in his presiding at the Eucharist that the bishop's ministry is most evident, as well as, in communion with him, the ministry of priests and deacons." ([CCC 1142](#))

The bottom line is we believe it is indeed Christ, our high priest that is offering the sacrifice (of himself) to the Father during the celebration of the Eucharist. The celebrating priest, by virtue of the possession of Holy Orders the Priest is configured, "...to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ's instrument for his Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet, and king." ([CCC 1581](#)) As a result, Jesus remains, "...the one and only mediator between God and men." ([CCC 480](#))

Q: Did Jerome deny the 3-tier episcopal structure? I've heard people say that he said it was a development and not apostolic. Is this claim true?

A: This is an area where a lot of ink (real and virtual) has been spilled over the years. Rather than spill even more virtual ink, I am going to reference you to a number of different resources that address your questions in a great deal of depth. Since you ask about Jerome's alleged denial of the 3-tier structure first, I would like to begin there as well. I recommend that you read this [ARTICLE](#) that does a fine job focusing in on that very issue. It clearly demonstrates that while you could proof-text Jerome to make a case that he saw no difference between Bishop and Priest, there is little doubt Jerome understood and supported a three-tiered hierarchical structure.

I would then suggest you read the following articles which speak to what the new Testament tells us ([ARTICLE 2](#)) and what the early 2nd to 4th century Church fathers can tell us ([ARTICLE 3](#)). Finally, this article ([ARTICLE 4](#)) from the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#). pulls it all together and even addresses the Jerome issue in some detail.

The bottom line is that modern scholarship reveals that the three-tiered structure has indeed been in place since the apostolic age and was established by the Apostles. We see that structure being referenced in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries by Church Fathers. Finally, while at the end of the 4th and into the early 5th centuries Jerome and others seem to cast some doubt on the existence and necessity of the three tiers, when his entire body of work is considered, Jerome's position in support of the three-tiered structure is clear.

Through 04/15/24

Q: Should John Paul II's shielding of Bernard Law after his role in abuse was revealed have prevented his canonization?

A: Cardinal Law was certainly in the eye of the storm of the sexual abuse scandal as it broke out in Boston in 2002. Cardinal Law acknowledged that he made critical mistakes (e.g., reassigning John Geoghan), resigned his position, and apologized for the role he played (more importantly what he failed to do) in allowing abuse to continue. (This article provides an objective summary of Cardinal Law's life, accomplishments, and errors - <https://www.ncregister.com/news/cardinal-bernard-francis-law-1931-2017-aozo7g3r>)

It is both difficult and unfair for us to evaluate what should and should not have been done twenty years ago. We have the advantage of hindsight which is always superior to what those living through the events had at their decision-making disposal. As Thomas G. Plante of Stanford University and Santa Clara University wrote in 2002 regarding the sexual abuse crisis "Almost all the cases coming to light today are cases from 30 and 40 years ago. We did not know much about pedophilia and sexual abuse in general back then. In fact, the vast majority of the research on sexual abuse of minors didn't emerge until the early 1980s. So, it appeared reasonable at the time to treat these men and then return them to their priestly duties. In hindsight, this was a tragic mistake." The bottom line is that Cardinal Law and other Bishops that presided over those men validly accused of sexual abuse were following the advice of "experts" in the field of psychology in taking the steps they took with the abusers. Unfortunately, as Plante points out, that "expert" knowledge and advice was woefully deficient and tragically in error.

So, the question of whether JP II appointing Cardinal Law archpriest of the Patriarchal Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome in 2004 (two years after Cardinal Law's resignation in Boston) was the right or wrong thing to do is debatable. While there are no bishops today that can claim ignorance of what should and should not be done in regard to reports of sexual abuse, that was not the case in Bernard Law's day. The advice and council bishops received from leaders in the field of psychology lead them to pursue treatment for abusers and then re-assign them when treatment was deemed "complete" and "successful." It seems absurd to us today with the knowledge we have in hand, but we must evaluate these men based upon what they knew and what advice they were being given by recognized "experts". You can argue that JP II was simply being just and refraining from "crucifying" Cardinal Law for something that he could not be reasonably expected to have handled differently. There was a reason why Cardinal Law was never indicted – prosecutors knew that Cardinal Law's actions were simply a case of him following the best "scientific" advice available in his day.

All that said, saints are not impeccable – error free and incapable of making an error. As a matter of fact, there is a pretty long list of saints that held what are by today's standards labeled heretical views. These men and women were orthodox in their day based upon the knowledge of doctrinal development that existed while they were alive, but centuries later it is clear to see they were in error. Applying today's standard of what is reasonable is not a valid means of evaluating a historical figure. We must always evaluate them based upon the knowledge that was available when they lived and hold them accountable for being aware of it.

So, my opinion, and that is all I can offer you is an opinion, is "No, JP II's handling of Cardinal Law should not have impacted his canonization." JP II's handling of Cardinal Law seems fair and just considering what both Cardinal Law and JP II should have been reasonably expected to know at the time. I am not sure if that helps as there is no definitive answer available. I am pretty sure that if you asked 20 different people you would get twenty different answers.

Q: Can Catholics celebrate Jewish Passover? Is there contradiction from USCCB 1988 document and the council of Florence here:

"Converts should be forbidden, under pain of severe penalties, to bury the dead according to the Jewish custom or to observe in any way the sabbath and other solemnities and rites of their old sect. Rather, they should frequent our churches and sermons, like other Catholics, and conform themselves in everything to Christian customs." <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/ecumenical-council-of-florence-1438-1445-1461>

"Seders arranged at or in cooperation with local synagogues are encouraged." <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/jewish/upload/God-s-Mercy-Endures-Forever-Guidelines-on-the-Presentation-of-Jews-and-Judaism-in-Catholic-Preaching-1988.pdf>

A: You are making a classic erroneous assumption. You are assuming that every document that the Magisterium produces carries with it the weight of doctrinal infallibility. This is not the case. The overwhelming majority of documents produced by the magisterium – including those produced by ecumenical councils – do NOT have the weight of infallibility attached to them. For example – there was not a single new infallible statement made in any of the 16 official Vatican

II documents. Even within a single document there can be a mix of infallible and mutable statements.

What you are interpreting as a contradiction is little more than a change in guidance that takes into account the cultural and historical situation that was in place when the statement was made. Church practices change over time. Remember that there are five levels of Church teaching and only three of them require the assent of the faithful and only two of them hold the weight of infallibility.

Q: What position or acts can you do when you're married? I'm scared to make love thinking I'm doing a mortal sin. Or what books do you recommend?

A: The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) address this topic in a fair amount of detail in [CCC 2360-2391](#). The key teaching is that any completed sexual act (where one or more of the parties achieve orgasm) between a husband and wife that is not open to life is a problem. There are certain acts of stimulation (e.g., involving one's hands or mouth) that can bring one or more parties to orgasm that are not open to life. These acts, if used for stimulation prior to the conjugal act which is open to life are perfectly acceptable as long as they are not used as an ends to themselves.

There are certain acts that are always wrong as they are an offense against human dignity as they involve the abuse of bodily systems designed for other purposes and, even if not intended, have a violent and dominating aspect to them. Sodomy is an example of such an act. However, other positions through which the complementary reproductive system of a man and woman are fully engaged (and open to life) are perfectly fine. It is not the position that is or is not problematic, but the body parts used and the purpose of that use that is important.

Here are a few Articles that might help you out:

[ARTICLE 1](#)

[ARTICLE 2](#)

[ARTICLE 3](#)

And an audio segment that you might find helpful => [43:12](#) - Why are certain sexual acts not allowed in marriage, specifically sodomy?

The bottom line is that if the completion of an act can result (not have to result) in the creation of new life and that act is freely engaged in by both parties as an act of total self-giving it is a valid act within God's plan for marriage.

Q: What's the point of having our own will if God is going to judge us at the end?

A: Without the great gifts of intellect and free will (this is what being made in God's image and likeness means) humans would be little more than animals. We would not be able to come to know God or do anything that was not aligned with our instinctual drives (our passions). Without these two great gifts we would be incapable of choosing to love – love is a choice to seek the good of another, not an emotional or carnal passion driven feeling.

God also gives us the natural moral law implanted in our hearts so that we can consistently choose the good. To make it absolutely clear, God revealed himself through his prophets and, eventually, through his Son, to make it very clear how we could live our lives in a way to become the best version of ourselves and realize our destiny as adopted sons and daughters. So, God gave us everything we need to succeed and the ability to choose our success.

Possessing free will also means we can choose to reject God. We can choose to believe that we, as finite and limited beings, know better that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God that has no interest in us other than to see us reach our maximum potential. We have a lifetime to make those choices. God knows we will often allow our intellect to be overcome by our passions so he also gives us the Liturgy and Sacraments so that when we fail, we can turn back to God and restore the relationship we have chosen to walk away from.

Only God knows what was in our hearts and minds when we chose the paths we took during our lives. As a result, only God is capable of judging whether our free will choices were indeed free and based on a full understanding of the moral law or if we suffered from things like invincible ignorance or psychological barriers (e.g., addictions) that would render us incapable of being responsible for choosing against the good.

The bottom line is intellect and free will allow us to love. Without them we would be little more than animals that are slaves to God. That is not what he wants for us. He wants us to freely choose to love and become the best version of ourselves. However, while he is a God of mercy and is always willing to take us back when we fail; he is also a God of justice who will ultimately judge if we did everything we could based upon the circumstances of our lives.

Q: For Jews that converted to Catholicism, Hebrew Catholics, can they still practice their Jewish customs like Seder meal and hanakha if as long as it doesn't make themselves view as a better catholic or it's to fulfill any spiritual or religious purpose, but as just a cultural expression. Does St. Paul condemn that they do, and what about church councils.

A: The Church has always recognized the special relationship the Jewish people share with God (see the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) and [CCC 839](#)). The Catholic faith is built upon and leverages much of the Jewish tradition in our faith practice. For Jews that convert to Catholicism there is absolutely no problem at all if they continue to celebrate important elements of their faith that are also critical parts of the Jewish culture. As a matter of fact, St. Paul indicates that those that are circumcised into the Jewish faith are "bound to keep the whole law." ([Galatians 5:3](#))

Throughout his letter to the Galatians St. Paul is addressing the [Judaizer controversy](#) – the belief by some early Jewish converts to Christianity that you had to observe the Jewish law before you could become Christian. This was addressed by what is known as the council of Jerusalem as outlined in [Acts 15:1-35](#) and subsequently reviewed by Paul in Galatians chapters 2-5. The bottom line is that you do not need to keep the Jewish law and ritual practices to be a Christian.

The key for Catholics that convert from the Jewish faith is that they must acknowledge that they cannot be justified by acts of the Jewish law or practice of Jewish traditions. St. Paul speaks to

this in Romans chapters 2-4. That said, since Judaism is both a ethnicity and religion the Church has no problem with those that are Jewish recognizing their Jewish heritage.

Q: Can you take the body of Christ more than once a day?

A: Yes. Current Canon law permits the reception of Holy Communion up to two times each calendar day. The first time can be in the context of a Mass, Communion Service, or some other rite that involves the distribution of Holy Communion by a valid minister. To receive it a second time it must be in the context of a Mass that you have actively participated in.

Q: Since we know Jesus went down to hell to rescue all the sinners, does that mean he collected Judas too?

A: We DON'T know that Jesus went down to hell to rescue all the sinners. When we profess that "He descended into hell" as part of the Apostle's Creed we do not mean he descended into the hell of the damned (where those that died in a state of mortal sin reside for all eternity) but simply the realm of the dead. You can read about this in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 631-635](#). As that section of the Catechism informs us, "Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which the dead Christ went down, 'hell' - Sheol in Hebrew or Hades in Greek - because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God. **Such is the case for all the dead, whether evil or righteous**, while they await the Redeemer: which does not mean that their lot is identical, as Jesus shows through the parable of the poor man Lazarus who was received into 'Abraham's bosom': **'It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Savior in Abraham's bosom, whom Christ the Lord delivered when he descended into hell.'** Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him." ([CCC 633](#))

So, Jesus did not go to the realm of the dead to rescue sinners, but rather to rescue the righteous dead who were waiting for the Savior to open the gates of heaven. Up until Jesus's passion and death, the gates of heaven were closed to humanity. Those in the hell of damnation who died having rejected God in their mortal lives were not "rescued". We do not know for sure who does and does not fit the criterion to be damned. We cannot presume to judge anyone on that front – including Judas. Judas would only have been "collected" if prior to his death he repented of the grave sin of aiding in the arrest and death of our living God. There are indications in scripture that he did not repent (e.g., [Matthew 26:24](#)). Meanwhile there are others that state he did repent (e.g., [Matthew 27:3](#)). Only God knows for sure.

Q: What is the moral weight and authority of papal bulls written like in medieval Europe from the pope into the current laity. To what degree are we bound to hold them as authoritative.

There are five levels of Church teaching (see table below). As with any Church document the degree to which we are bound to hold them as authoritative is dependent upon the specific declarations made within them and language used to make those declarations. Any single document can have multiple levels of Church teaching contained within it so there is no such thing as an doctrinal document but rather a document that may or may not contain one or more doctrinal teachings that impose various levels of assent upon the Catholic faithful (Dogmatic, Doctrine-Infallible, Doctrine-Mutable).

Papal bulls are among the most famous document a pope issues as many people have heard of them even if they have no idea what they are. You can read about Bulls [HERE](#). “Because a bull was simply any letter issued with a bulla, this did not reveal much about its content, though the use of a leaden seal adds solemnity and importance...Eventually, papal briefs – a simpler form of document – began to replace the bull. Setting aside the physical form they take, papal documents...fall along a spectrum of solemnity...as follows: Apostolic Constitutions, Encyclicals, Motu Proprios, Other Apostolic Letter, Apostolic Exhortations, Letters, Homilies, Speeches, Catecheses, Angelus / Regina Caeli Addresses, Fernorinos, Books Interview...” (Akin, Jimmy; *Teaching with Authority*; Catholic Answer Press; El Cajon, CA; 2018; pgs. 112-113) While Apostolic Constitutions and Encyclicals very often do include doctrinal teachings they do not have to. As with any document issued by the Pope, the Magisterium, or other individual members of the Magisterium the weight they have has to do with the specific statement they contain, and the language used to make that statement.

The bottom line with regards to the degree to which we are bound to papal bulls written at any time in Church history, the answer is 100% dependent upon the individual bull and its content and NOT the fact that it was a papal bull. If you want to get a better understanding of the authority of Church documents, I suggest you read the book referenced above by Jimmy akin. I am sure you will find the book both enlightening and a little frustrating as when it comes to church documents a set of super clear and consistent rules simply does not exist when it comes to defining a document’s level of authority.

Level	Source	Type of Assent Required
Dogma	God (Scripture & Tradition)	Assent of Theological Faith - requires an act of the will, not merely an act of the intellect.
Doctrine– Infallible	Magisterium Acting Officially	Firm and Definitive Assent - We recognize the infallible nature of the teaching and work to come to an intellectual Recognition of these definitive truths.
Doctrine – Mutable	Magisterium Acting Officially	Religious Submission of Will and Intellect - We submit to the authority that Christ established for His Church.
Non-Doctrinal Statements	Members of the Magisterium Acting As Individuals	Received With Respect & Gratitude BUT Does NOT Require Assent
Theological Opinions	Clergy, Theologians / Catechists	None Required

Q: I have recently heard about something called the documentary hypothesis claiming the first 5 Books of Moses weren’t written until like 400 B.C. and this has me very concerned because if this is true then I feel like that completely dismantles the Bible and I see people online claiming it to be proven and this has me very worried.

A: A theory known as the documentary hypothesis became popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to this theory, the Pentateuch (first five books of the bible) is based on four documents (the Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomistic sources) that were written between the tenth and sixth centuries B.C. and later combined and published, perhaps in the fifth century B.C. In the last few decades the documentary hypothesis has come under increasing criticism from both conservative and liberal scholars, and at present there is no

consensus.” (Akin, Jimmy; *The Bible is a Catholic Book*; Catholic Answers Press; El Cajon, CA; 2020; pg. 23) One of the reasons the hypothesis has fallen out of favor is that we have never found any of the four hypothetical books or any references to their existence in any other document that we have found. They are the product of scholarly imagination attempting to project that such books exist and explain the variations in both writing style and content we find in the Pentateuch. Another reason is that the Samaritans are descendants of the ten northern tribes of Israel that seceded and formed their own nation around 930 B.C. – long before these hypothetical books of the Documentary hypothesis were written. However, the Samaritans have the same five books of the Bible (the only five they recognize as Sacred Scripture) and claim to have had them from before the split with the balance of the original twelve tribes. You really need to be careful about what people assert to be true or “proven.” Anyone can assert anything they want. Proving those assertions are true are another matter entirely and the relevance of those assertions are yet another matter altogether.

All that said, “The Church doesn’t have a position on precisely when individual books of Scripture were written or how they were composed. It leaves these matters to scholars. From a perspective of faith, the important thing is God began to give his inspired word to man. The precise dates on which he did are secondary.” (IBID; pg. 24). Basically, what the Church teaches is that all seventy-three books of the biblical canon are the inspired word of God and it is irrelevant who wrote them or when they were written. The correctness of the Documentary hypothesis has no impact on the Pentateuch’s inspiration or the inspiration of any other book of the bible for that matter.

Q: I heard that for a mortal sin to be truly mortal the sinner must have full knowledge of what they're doing. So if I do something and then I find out that it's a mortal sin is it still a mortal sin? Or is it Venial now or something?

A: Thanks for the question. Let's start with the clear teaching on Mortal sins found in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). [CCC 1857-1859](#) informs us that, “For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: Mortal sin is sin whose object is **grave matter** and which is also committed with **full knowledge** and **deliberate consent**. **Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments**...The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger. **Mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent**. It presupposes **knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law**. It also implies **a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice**. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin.”

So you are correct. The individual must be fully aware of the gravity of the act they are committing. However, the Catechism also informs us that while, “Unintentional ignorance can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense.... no one is deemed to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, which are written in the conscience of every man.” ([CCC 1860](#)) This means that there are certain sinful acts (e.g., the deliberate killing of an innocent human being) that everyone should understand is a grave sin without having to have someone explicitly teach them that. As a result of this, in most instances it would be rare that someone would commit a mortal sin and not have knowledge of it as a grave offense.

In the case where one may have been unaware of the gravity of sin (e.g., someone did not realize that damaging someone spiritually or psychologically is as grave as damaging them physically – all are violations of the 5th commandment) and then becomes aware, they should indeed confess it as a mortal sin when they become aware. Even if the sin was committed when a complete understanding of the sin's gravity was not in place, culpability for the seriousness of that sin is fully restored once an accurate understanding of its gravity is obtained. Hence, it must be confessed no matter how much time has passed between when it was committed and when "full knowledge" was gained.

Q: My question is one about original sin. What sparked my interest in it was initially certain views of predestination, in which God has already fixed one's fate to hell, before they were even born as articulated by Calvin and as I later found out also by great catholic saints like Aquinas and Augustine, both of them I find it hard to respect after knowing that, especially along with Augustine's view of infants. I found that view of predestination cruel and unjust. I know that there are other views of predestination out there that, as far as I know, a Catholic can hold. But in my opinion a Christian who accepts Original sin, whatever articulation of the doctrine, can not object to that predestinarian doctrine on the basis of justice. A Christian might find it false and maybe object to it on several grounds, but not on the grounds of justice. If one accepts Original sin, then one accepts either that infants are already conceived guilty as Augustine taught, or might take a less severe view in which infants are though not guilty, they nevertheless inherit such a nature that it will be impossible for them when they mature to avoid committing sins, and become guilty all the same, out of this necessity beyond their control. Indeed, some Christians even claim to deny that they believe in Original sin, but still believe in the essence of the second version, and the Bible does not seem to portray us becoming guilty as a mere accident or any series of avoidable choices by us born after Adam, but portrays it as a fixed necessity. And hence in my estimation due to Original sin, one is forced to conclude that the specific version of predestination is, even if false in the end, just because one is born becomes guilty by necessity whichever version of Original sin one believes in, and being guilty, deserving of hell God would be just to give the person just what that person deserves, despite not ever having had any choice about it. I see that conclusion absurd, and do not see how Original sin can be viewed as just. Nor do I see how forgiveness would fix this issue. However, many and great sins I have committed voluntarily, and however much I might deserve hell, which I know for certain I do deserve, God allegedly nevertheless holds me also guilty of the crimes I could never help but commit and offers forgiveness to those as well, offering to forgive me things beyond my control that he still holds me guilty of. That seemed to me like a mockery of justice and hence mercy which presupposes justice, and since then I could never pray "forgive us our trespasses" sincerely, always feeling as if I was also mocking justice and trying to get on the good side of a cosmic tyrant I could in no way see as just or good. I don't think I could ever worship that God, and I have tried painfully for a long time. I also greatly doubt that I am misinterpreting the doctrine to any degree that matters, or that Christianity has any good answer to why such a thing would be just. But I could not rest well in good conscience leaving Christianity altogether behind writing it off before I made sure of those two things and the Catholics I know are not nearly studied enough on the subject to give the best (or often any) answer, and the Protestants I know are either on the same camp or are Calvinists. Please, prove me wrong.

A: There is a lot there, but I will try to work through it as best I can. As a starting point you seem to have several misunderstandings of Catholic Doctrine (original sin, predestination, grace, etc...) as well as the teachings of St. Thomas and St. Augustine. That should be good news from your perspective as you have asked that we try to, "prove (you) wrong."

Let's start with a review of some basic Catholic Teachings around original sin:

1. "Original Sin" is not something that was "passed down" and we all carry with us as much as it is a deprivation of original holiness and justice (sanctifying grace) that God had given our first parents that was above our nature. By rejecting God, our first parents rejected this gift and hence we no longer have access to it – it was never part of human nature as it was a preternatural gift. This means we lost the ability of our reason to consistently control our passions and hence we suffer from concupiscence – a desire to sin (to choose against God). So "Original Sin" is a lack of something not something that was unjustly given to us. You can read about that in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 396-412](#).
2. We are not enemies of God. Rather, as soon as our first parents rejected God, he demonstrated his love for us in that despite this rejection he turned around and promised an even better end state for us than we had in Eden. He promised us a savior (see [Genesis 3:15](#)). We think of our first parent's failure as a "Happy Fault." Had they not failed we would have essentially remained in the childlike state our first parents existed in completely dependent upon God for everything. Because they fell, we have been given an even greater opportunity to grow and mature and reach the level of perfection necessary to live with God in heaven.
3. We are not damned to hell at birth. God gives all humans the natural law embedded in our souls as a sort of "compass" that allows us to navigate the world and choose the good. Prior to Christ's salvific act many people did follow this natural law compass and lived righteous lives. Upon death, the righteous did not go to the hell of damnation, but rather the place of the dead waiting for the Savior to arrive and open the gates of heaven. We see Jesus himself talk about this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:19-31](#)).
4. We cannot be made ready to enter heaven without God's grace as we must be perfect to enter heaven ([Matthew 5:48](#), [Revelation 21:27](#)), but we can live righteous lives and avoid the hell of damnation. We have the ability, through God's grace, to reach that state of perfection in this life. If we fail to do so but remain in friendship with God (free of unabsolved mortal sin), God will make us perfect after we die through the purgation process so that we can enter heaven. (see [CCC 1030-1032](#))
5. God created us to live in love with him. Everything we have, including our very lives, is a free gift from God. We do not deserve these gifts and there is nothing we can do to earn them. Since God exists outside of time, he knew our first parents would fail and his ultimate plan for our salvation and life with him in heaven was the plan from the very beginning. When the fullness of time arrived, and the world was prepared to accept the fullness of God's revelation of who he is (A good Father) and who we are (Beloved sons and daughters) he sent his only (and eternally begotten) Son to show us the way that humanity could take to become the perfect beings we must be to enter eternal life with God in heaven. (See [CCC 600](#), [CCC 2782](#) for a little more on this)
6. God's plan always included our ultimate salvation through his son and the sacrifice he made. God never damned us to a life of suffering and eternal punishment. He allows us to choose that by rejecting him, but he gives us the gifts we need to make that choice.

He then goes a step further and gives us access to sanctifying grace through the Liturgy and Sacraments so we can rise above our nature and live in heaven with him. We simply need to accept the free gift of that grace. Jesus came to teach us this and establish his Church to be the ordinary vehicle through which this grace is accessed.

Now let's move on to St. Thomas and his teaching....

Thomas Aquinas did not agree with John Calvin regarding predestination. Aquinas' teaching emphasizes that the elect are saved by the grace of God, which operates on their wills efficaciously and infallibly without detriment to their liberty, and that God sincerely desires the salvation of all men. On the other hand, Calvin's view of predestination is more fatal to free will, where man can perform no good act unless necessitated by God's grace, which is impossible to resist. Aquinas' emphasis on the compatibility of God's grace with human free will contrasts with Calvin's more deterministic view of predestination which teaches that certain men are predestined to hell and others to heaven. Aquinas' teaching on predestination is aligned with the Catholic understanding of the balance between God's grace and human cooperation in salvation.

If you want to read more about Thomas' view, the Molinist view, the view of the various Protestant reformers (including Calvin) and both historical and modern philosophical view points on free will / predestination this [ARTICLE](#) from the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) is excellent. Over time I, have come to appreciate the Molinist view more and more and that is a perfectly acceptable Catholic view that I think will resonate with you.

Now let's address some of that St. Augustine confusion. Calvin himself attempts to claim that his belief in double predestination – a truly horrific view of God for sure – was confirmed long before his time by Augustine. In his “Institutes of the Christian Religion” Calvin does a masterful job of proof texting Augustine to support this position. However, you need to keep in mind that even the devil used proof texting in his effort to tempt Christ ([Matthew 4:5-6](#)) – a fine example of the dangers of proof texting. You need to take all of Augustine's writings in context of who they were written for and what they were written to address (e.g., he spent time fighting both Manicheism and Pelagianism which led to some of his writings appearing to support Calvin's position) to get a complete picture of his position. If you do not do this, you can be quite easily misled into believing Augustine denied free will and other anti-Catholic positions. One should especially consider Augustine's, “Retractationes” written at the end of his life to clarify his positions where he clarified positions where he thought his original writings could potentially mislead someone. If you want to get a good summary of what Augustine actually thought about free will and predestination these articles from Catholic Answers do a fine job of walking you through the basics – [ARTICLE 1](#), [ARTICLE 2](#), [ARTICLE 3](#), [ARTICLE 4](#).

Moving forward from here I do feel I need to point out that while we love and respect both Thomas and Augustine as masters of philosophical and theological thought, they are not the magisterium of the Church. As a result, we recognize that they can indeed be in error when it comes to declarations of faith and morals. Only the magisterium is protected by the Holy Spirit when making declarations on faith and morals that all of the faithful are bound to accept and adhere to. When you want authentic Church teaching you need to refer to official magisterial documents – not ecclesial writers.

The bottom line is that the Church does not teach and has never taught that:

- Double predestination is valid
- We do not possess free will
- “Original sin” somehow makes us guilty of some offense against God
- That God holds us accountable for sins we do not commit

The “god” you describe above is indeed a tyrant and evil. This is not the God of Christianity that has been revealed to us and who has adopted us as beloved sons and daughters.

Through 04/08/24

Q: In Matthew 19:1-9 Jesus seems to imply that Divorce is permissible when “unchastity” is involved. I understand that the underlying Greek word there is “porneia” and that mean adultery. Why doesn’t the Catholic Church allow for divorce when one spouse commits adultery if Jesus said it was OK?

A: The “porneia” clause (which only appears in Matthew’s Gospel) has been hotly debated for centuries. Fortunately, modern textual criticism has, in this case, greatly expanded out understanding. As this [ARTICLE](#) by Catholic Answers’ Karlo Broussard highlights, in this context porneia was likely referring not to adultery but to unlawful marriages (e.g., incest, bloodlines not separated enough, etc...). Based upon the arguments laid out by Karlo it is very difficult to argue that Jesus was providing an allowance for divorce in the case of adultery.

Q: Good Evening! How could Jesus have at one point been NOT incarnate in heaven, but now incarnate in heaven if God lives in the Eternal Now and cannot change?

A: This is a good question that has been asked in a variety of forms for the last two thousand years. Let’s start with what the Church teaches leveraging the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#):

- “We firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, **eternal infinite (immensus) and unchangeable**, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; **three persons indeed, but one essence, substance or nature entirely simple.** ([CCC 202](#))
- “The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the ‘consubstantial Trinity’. **The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire:** ‘The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e. by nature one God.’ In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), ‘**Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature.**’” ([CCC 253](#))
- “‘But **when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law**, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.’ This is ‘the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’: ‘God has visited his people. He has fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and his descendants. He acted far beyond all expectation - he has sent his own ‘beloved Son.’” ([CCC 422](#))
- “Taking up St. John’s expression, ‘**The Word became flesh**’, the Church calls ‘**Incarnation**’ **the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it.** In a hymn cited by St. Paul, the Church sings the mystery of the Incarnation:

‘Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, **taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.** And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.’” ([CCC 461](#))

- “Because **‘human nature was assumed, not absorbed’**, in the mysterious union of the Incarnation, the Church was led over the course of centuries to confess the full reality of Christ's human soul, with its operations of intellect and will, and of his human body. In parallel fashion, she had to recall on each occasion that **Christ's human nature belongs, as his own, to the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it.** Everything that Christ is and does in this nature derives from ‘one of the Trinity’. **The Son of God therefore communicates to his humanity his own personal mode of existence in the Trinity.** In his soul as in his body, Christ thus expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity: The Son of God. . . worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.” ([CCC 470](#))

As you can see Sacred Scripture as summarized in the Catechism informs us that the Son became incarnate at a specific and identifiable point in time. Prior to the incarnation, the Son was living in the communion of the Trinity that is the 3 persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – that share a single unchangeable nature. Through the incarnation the divine nature did not undergo any change. Rather, a human nature was assumed by the second person of the Trinity without any changes being made to the divine nature of the one God. God broke into time and space to complete his revelation and accomplish our salvation in the form of the divine person that is Jesus – one person with two distinct natures (one outside of time and one within the temporal order – the hypostatic union). Jesus continues to live in heaven in bodily form as a divine person with two natures – one unchanging divine nature and one human nature. Of course, we do not fully understand how a person with a human nature experiences time in heaven.

The bottom line is the key to understanding how God can both become (and stay) incarnate and yet remain outside of time and unchanging is to remember that in assuming a human nature his divine nature remained completely intact. Jesus is not a mixture of God and Man – he is fully God and fully man at the same time. In his divinity he is outside of the temporal order while in his humanity he is fully engaged in it and subject to the same changes that the rest of us complex material beings are subjected to.

Most (me included) have a hard enough time trying to wrap their heads around the trinity – three persons sharing a single nature. I give you kudos for stepping into the even deeper water (in many respects) of the hypostatic union – one person with two distinct natures. Hopefully, this was a little helpful in helping you wrap your head around one of the great mysteries of our faith.

Q: I've heard from some that apostolic tradition can't be reliable and an often quoted example is that Irenaeus believed and taught that Jesus died an old man and that he got that from apostolic tradition. Did Irenaeus really believe that or am I missing something here? Blessings.

A: That is a bizarre claim to say the least. Irenaeus certainly did not teach that, "...that Jesus died an old man and that he got that from apostolic tradition." Whoever told you that is simply asserting an absurdity. Next time someone makes a claim like that that seems to directly contradict what we know to be true, ask them to prove it by providing reliable sources. In this case, if they cannot point to writings of Irenaeus that support this assertion, it is simply a baseless claim.

Here is a sample of what Irenaeus actually believed about Jesus, "The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in **one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation**; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and **the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father to gather all things in one**, Ephesians 1:10 and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order **that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess** Philippians 2:10-11 to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send spiritual wickednesses, Ephesians 6:12 and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory." ([Against Heresies, 10](#))
So clearly Irenaeus was aware that Christ did not die of old age but suffered, died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

Now some will point to [Against Heresies Book II Chapter 22](#) paragraphs 4-6 as evidence that Irenaeus was wrong about Christ's age and will then argue that if he was wrong about such an important point that he could not be viewed as a reliable source. These same people will argue that if Irenaeus was not a reliable source, and he claimed to be carrying on apostolic tradition; that apostolic tradition must be unreliable as well. That is a long series of stretches to be sure. I would argue that Irenaeus did not get Christ age wrong but even if he did you could not jump from Irenaeus being wrong to Apostolic tradition in unreliable.

In this area of [Against Heresies](#), Irenaeus was arguing against Gnostics that believed Christ died at age 30 after a single year of ministry. In paragraph 3 Irenaeus argues that Christ experienced three Passovers after his ministry started at his Baptism. He leads off paragraph 4 by reiterating what we learn in the Gospel of Luke ([Luke 3:23](#)) that Christ was baptized and began his ministry when he was about 30. Irenaeus also makes the point that Jesus had reached the age of master (begins as age 30) and then dedicates the rest of the paragraph to point out that Christ experienced every phase of human life from childhood to old age having reached the age of master.

In paragraph 5 Irenaeus makes the point that the age of master extends into one's forties and fifties until extreme old age is reached in one's sixties. We then get to paragraph 6 where many

will argue that Irenaeus is using the argument between Jesus and the Jewish religious leadership in [John 8:56-57](#) to demonstrate that it is likely that at that point Jesus was closer to fifty than thirty. I would counter that Irenaeus was simply banging home the point with the Gnostics that Jesus was clearly more than 30 years old when he died. Considering that Irenaeus was well aware that Jesus' ministry began at age thirty and that he experienced three Passovers it is difficult to argue otherwise.

Again, the approach I would always recommend you take when attempting to ascertain the validity of claims you hear is to demand the claimant prove his/her points by providing references (first hand if possible). In this case, they were making a dubious claim but even if Irenaeus did believe Jesus was in or near his fifties when he died, that could not be extrapolated to assuming that Apostolic tradition was unreliable.

Q: A full living person is a Body+Soul+Spirit, right? But Jesus also says (about people in Heaven) that God is the god of the living, not the dead, even though all those in Heaven (the Saints) have no living bodies (except people like Elijah, Mary, Enoch, and possibly Moses). So, since their bodies are in the grave, or in Reliquaries, etc., how is it that the Saints are alive in Heaven, despite missing their bodies?

A: I want to start by recommending you review the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) and [CCC 362-368](#). In that section you will find that paragraph CCC 367 informs us that there is no real distinction between spirit and soul and that St. Paul was not teaching that in [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#). Therefore, your equation "Body+Soul+Spirit = A Full Living Person" is not valid. That section of the Catechism also informs us that, "In Sacred Scripture the term "soul" often refers to human life or the entire human person. But 'soul' also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image: 'soul' signifies the spiritual principle in man." We also read, "The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to **consider the soul to be the 'form' of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body;** spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature." ***Our soul is the source of life within us.*** The soul animates the body and is what is the essence of our lives.

The Catechism goes on to inform us that, "Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ. The New Testament speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ in his second coming, but also repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith. **The parable of the poor man Lazarus and the words of Christ on the cross to the good thief, as well as other New Testament texts speak of a final destiny of the soul--**a destiny which can be different for some and for others. **Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death,** in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven--through a purification or immediately, -- or immediate and everlasting damnation." ([CCC 1021-1022](#)) Meanwhile [CCC 988-990](#) informs us that, "The Christian Creed...culminates in the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead on the last day and in life everlasting. We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day...The term 'flesh' refers to man in his state of weakness and mortality. The 'resurrection of the flesh' (the literal formulation of the Apostles' Creed) **means not only that the immortal soul will live**

on after death, but that even our ‘mortal body’ will come to life again.” Finally, [CCC 997](#) informs us that, **“In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body.** God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus' Resurrection.”

All this means that our immortal souls do not require our bodies to live. It is quite the opposite – our bodies require the presence of our souls to animate them. As a result, the saints in heaven who experience the beatific vision through the presence of their souls alone, are certainly alive. Many will make the case that the souls in heaven are more alive than we are here as they have the beatific vision – the one thing that we all long for and makes us complete.

Q: My question is regarding God’s permissive will. If God ultimately controls and allows even the devil, why do we pray to St. Michael to protect us from the snares of the devil? Aren’t these snares ultimately permitted by God? And so by praying in this way, aren’t we ultimately asking St. Michael to defend us from something that God would otherwise be allowing? And secondly, if Christ has already won the victory by His Cross and Resurrection, why exactly do we ask St. Michael to defend us in battle? I do believe in spiritual warfare as I experience it but I don’t fully understand it. Please forgive me as even reading these questions I sort of cringe...I do not mean in any way to sound unorthodox, scandalous, or even heretical! I am a man of deep faith. As I continue to grow in the spiritual life, the theology of evil and how it relates to God’s will is something I’m desiring to understand better and this question has been on my mind consistently. Thank you very much.

A: I want to start by addressing a part of your premise. God certainly has a providential plan as he exists out of time and already is aware of the outcome of our choices whether you favor the Thomist perspective of a single set of choices or the Molinist view of an infinite number of choices and outcomes with God being aware of all possibilities. In either case God’s awareness of the outcome does not mean he controls our actions at that detailed level any more than a man standing on top of a tall building causes a car accident below because he is aware that the two cars are hurtling towards each other. As a result, God does not “control” our choices and actions as he gives his creatures (including the angels who fell) free will. What God does do is make sure that any evil he permits can result in an even greater good (e.g., a tragic natural disaster can be turned into a massive opportunity for others to grow in virtue as millions respond with support).

Asking St. Michael to intercede for us against the devil is based on biblical passage like [Daniel 10:10-14](#), [Jude 9:9](#), and [Revelation 12:7](#) that describe Michael doing battle with fallen angels. While God may allow the devil to lay down “snares” for us he does not prevent any of us, including Michael, from taking action to avoid or overcome those snares. The facts that Christ has already won the war does not mean that there are not battles that need to be fought. The devil and his fellow fallen angels have not simply rolled over and given up. The demonic realm continues to do everything they can to distract and destroy as many of God’s children as possible. The Devil wants to take as many of us as possible with him to destruction.

Q: My daughter went to confession last Wednesday, priest gave a penance, first, pray the passion of St. John over the Triduum, second told her to go to a Muslim service on the college campus to see that they worship the same Jesus. Is it true, they worship the same Jesus?, also, does she have to go? We only go to Catholic masses, we don’t even go to other Christian churches. Thanks for the help!

A: That is certainly an unusual penance and a totally false statement regarding Muslim religious beliefs. Muslims worship the one true God but have a flawed understanding of him. They do not believe in a triune God. While they believe Jesus was an important historical figure, they consider him a human prophet not God himself. Therefore, not only do they NOT worship the same Jesus; they do not worship Jesus at all.

As for the second half of that penance the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, “The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and **must seek his spiritual good**. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. **It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear**. Such **penances help configure us to Christ**, who alone expiated our sins once for all.” ([CCC 1460](#)) Requiring someone to participate in a non-Catholic service, even as an observer, would be clearly outside the bounds of a valid penance.

Is it possible that your daughter is subjecting you to an April fools’ joke? Alternatively, could she have misunderstood the Priest? If it is not an April fools’ joke on the part of your daughter I would suggest she go back that priest and ask for clarification as it is likely she misheard him.

Through 04/02/24

Q: Someone from my college told me that “the Catholic Church...had arguably the greatest extent of involvement and cover up.” Is it true the Vatican covered up its abuse scandal? How should I respond to people mentioning this as a critique to the church.

A: My first response would be that this is the most ridiculous claim I have ever heard, and I would laugh in their face. That would be uncharitable, however, so let’s try a different approach. The first step would be to have them prove their outrageous claim. If someone asserts something, then they should have some facts and figures to back it up. The burden of proof is on someone making an assertion to prove their claim. Too often Catholics assume they must prove what others state is not true rather than make the person making an outrageous claim back it up.

If you want a detailed argument to share with them after that refer to the attached. This is the type of thing they should be able to offer you to demonstrate their assertion.



Session 6
Handout.docx

Through 04/01/24

Q: My brother-in-law isn’t a baptized Christian, but my sister is. In order for my nephew to get baptized does his dad need to be baptized into the Christian faith? Is it possible for my brother in law

to go through RCIA receiving baptism, first communion and confirmation at Easter Vigil in one yearly program?

A: In order for a child to be baptized into the Catholic faith Canon Law 868 prescribes the following:

“For an infant to be baptized licitly: 1) the parents or at least one of them or the person who legitimately takes their place must consent; 2) there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be delayed according to the prescripts of particular law after the parents have been advised about the reason.”

Therefore, whether one or both parents are baptized is not the primary concern and is not a requirement. The requirement is that consent to have the child baptized is provided by at least one of the parents and that there is a reasonable hope that the child will be raised Catholic.

Canon 872 informs us that:

“Insofar as possible, a person to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation or together with the parents presents an infant for baptism. A sponsor also helps the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it.”

Therefore, a Sponsor or Godparent should be provided for the individual being baptized although it is not necessary.

Canon 874 informs us that:

“To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must: 1) be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function, 2) have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause, 3) be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on, 4) not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared, 5) not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.”

Therefore, if a Sponsor to be selected only a fully initiated and actively practicing Catholic can serve as a sponsor at a Catholic baptism.

The bottom line is that if your sister and brother-in-law are intending to raise the child as a Catholic and provide instruction to support that goal, there is no requirement that one or both of them be baptized (Catholic or otherwise). If they choose to have one or more sponsors, the sponsors will need to be fully initiated and actively practicing Catholics.

As for your brother-in-law being fully initiated into the Catholic church through the reception of the sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion – the answer is a clear yes. That is the purpose of the RCIA / OCIA (Rite / Order of Christian Initiation of Adults)

program. Most parishes run a one-year program that culminates with the Easter Vigil. Many also run customized programs that fit the unique needs (e.g., work schedules, faith background, etc...) of individuals that proceed at a variety of paces specific to the individual and program. These people can receive their sacraments of initiation at any Mass during the year depending upon their readiness and desire to do so.

Q: How do I respond to anti-Semitic Catholics that quote church fathers and doctors of the church to validate their opinions against the Jews, such as John Chrysostom homily “against the Jews” or Thomas Aquinas letter “Letter on the Treatment of Jews”. And How do we know when we should reject opinions from the doctors of the church or church fathers.

A: Let’s start with the second half of your question... You should always remember that Church Fathers, Doctors, and Saints do not speak authoritatively with regards to the teaching of the Church. Only the Magisterium can do that. Therefore, when one of these ecclesial writers offers something that is clearly in opposition to Church teaching it must be understood for what it is – the flawed understanding of a flawed man or woman who was shaped by the context of their time.

As for the first part of your question I refer to the above statement. We respect the Church Fathers, Doctors, and Saints as early witnesses to the faith. We rely on their consensus understanding to help us grasp a better understanding of Church teaching. However, their individual, disparate views are not a source of magisterial teaching and hence can and sometimes should be ignored as flawed.

I would then point out what the church does teach regarding our spiritual ancestors – the Jewish people. You can start with paragraph 16 from [Lumen Gentium](#) which states, “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 to whom the testament and the promises were given (the Jews) 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.” This short passage references [Romans 9:4-5](#) and [Romans 11:28-29](#).

You can then move on to the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) and bring them to [CCC 597-598](#) which states, “Hence we **cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews** in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost. **Jesus himself, in forgiving them on the cross, and Peter in following suit, both accept ‘the ignorance’ of the Jews of Jerusalem and even of their leaders. Still less can we extend responsibility to other Jews of different times and places,** based merely on the crowd's cry: ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’, a formula for ratifying a judicial sentence. As the Church declared at the Second Vatican Council. . . **[N]either all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion. . . [T]he Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed** as if this followed from holy Scripture. **All sinners were the authors of Christ's Passion...**In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that ‘sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured.’ **Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself, the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon**

Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone..." (you may also want to reference CCC 674, 755, 781, and 839).

The Jewish people were chosen by God to bring the Good News about who God is and what humanity could be to the rest of the world. Considering all the first Christians were Jewish – they did indeed fulfil that obligation (God truly works in mysterious ways). God entered into progressively deeper covenants with the Jewish people (Adam – a covenant with a couple, Noah – a covenant with an extended family, Abraham – a covenant with a clan or tribe, Moses – a covenant with a people, David – a covenant with a nation of peoples). A covenant cannot be broken (this is the basis for the indissolubility of marriage) even if one party fails to meet its commitments. Man has failed in all its covenants with God including the “new and everlasting” covenant of Christ with all humanity. God has never abandoned or failed in his side of the covenants he has established. Hence the covenants with the Jewish people remain in tact and God will continue to observe them until the end of the age.

Q: Is it correct to say that Jesus bore our sins and iniquities, and had our guilt laid on him, to Pay for them and make Restitution, instead of being punished for them by God the Father (like in penal substitutionary atonement)?

A: We do not believe that a just and loving God would punish an innocent man for the sins of others. This is especially true for his only begotten son. In the same way, we do not believe we are “clothed in Christ’s righteousness” while remaining filthy below. We believe that Christ provides us the means of transformation (grace) through the Liturgy and Sacraments so that we can actually grow in virtue, overcome our sinful nature by developing self-mastery, and be transformed to be more and more like Christ himself.

As for the Church’s teaching on atonement (At-One-Ment ... reconciling parties) it is laid out well in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) which states, “Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ who offered himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men. Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy. Its purpose is the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life.” ([CCC 1992](#)) (NOTE: That entire section on Grace and Justification is worth reading – [CCC 1987-2029](#))

Q: I do not get the whole idea of the host becoming actual flesh and blood. To my Protestant upbringing this seems borderline barbaric and cannibalistic even. Can you explain this?

A: When the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) states that, “By the consecration the transubstantiation of the bread and wine ... Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity” ([CCC 1413](#)) the Church is trying to convey that Christ is **substantially present NOT physically present** in his physical body.

Metaphysically the essence of something (what it is that makes it what it is) is indeed what we term its substance. A being’s “accidents” – its physical characteristics perceivable by our senses (appearance, taste, smell, feel, sounds it makes) – can change without impacting what it

substantially is (e.g., my hair has gone from black to gray, but I am still who I have always been). When we talk about the “Real Presence” it is a substantial presence that we are talking about. Jesus is physically present in heaven in bodily form, but the God who created everything out of nothing, changed water into wine, multiplied the fish and loaves, etc... can certainly make himself substantially present in the Eucharist.

Christ simply told us that, “This is my body....this is my blood...” ([Mark 14:22-24](#)) The Church’s description of Christ being present, “body, blood, soul and divinity,” is an attempt to make it clear that the substance of Christ’s body and blood are present without getting into the metaphysical principles that underpin that understanding. Metaphysics can be brain twisting for those that study it extensively, using the words, “body, blood, soul and divinity” is simply an easy way to convey that the total essence of who and what Christ is present to us in the Eucharist without having to give everyone a course on metaphysics.

All this means that we do not believe we are consuming human flesh and blood. We believe we are consuming Christ’s essence/substance so we can be healed of our sin, strengthened against future sin, transformed to be more like Christ and unified to both Christ and his Church.

Q: I haven't been to confession in many years and want to go soon. However, in my last confession (at least 20 years ago) I'm in doubt as to whether I confessed a few certain sins that I'm fairly certain I confessed, but feel the need to confess them again anyway just to make sure. Would it be okay to just go on the fact that I know in my heart that I did confess them, and that God does too? Or should I re-confess based on the slim uncertainty. Also, if one makes a confession but withholds one or more mortal sins, intentionally and then leaves after being given absolution I know that your confession and absolution isn't valid because of the sins withheld. However, if you go to confession afterwards and confess that you withheld sins in your last confession and proceed to confess the sins that you withheld...do you have to then, also re-confess all the other sins in the previous confession in which you withheld the sins or are those forgiven without repetition once you confess the sins you withheld?

A: Since it has been twenty years since your last confession, I would recommend that you call your local parish and set-up a private confession with a priest in his office. This way you will not be rushed, and the priest will have the time to help you work through any questions and concerns you may have. At the same time, if you show up in a standard confession line you would be putting a lot of pressure on a priest who may have a long line of frequent penitents waiting behind you.

Let’s turn to your questions. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, “When Christ's faithful **strive to confess all the sins that they can remember**, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. **But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some**, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know.” ([CCC 1456](#)) This means that as long as you intended to confess all your sins, and did not deliberately withhold mortal sins while offering your confession, it was valid and the guilt of all your sins, those you confessed as well as those you may have forgotten, has been absolved. You state, “I'm almost certain I confessed the sins in question and remember the joy and relief of confessing the particular sins...” Not only is it

likely that you did confess the sins in question, but that was clearly your intent and hence anything you may have forgotten when that confession was offered is forgiven.

If a sin you should have confessed during one confession comes clearly to mind later, you should indeed confess it at your next confession even though the guilt of it has been removed. Unless you have that clear knowledge, there is no reason to confess that sin. As you describe it, you do not have that clear knowledge – quite the opposite as a matter of fact.

If you had deliberately withheld sins that would render the entire confession invalid. In that case you must confess everything (including those sins that were confessed) and include the new sin of deliberately withholding the unconfessed sin in the previous confession. Again, it does not seem like this is the situation in your case.

Q: I had lunch with a guy who recently left a Baptist church and joined a non-denominational church. Anyways we started talking about faith. Seemed like he had a predetermined set of question that he said, "I normally asked Catholic's". Anyways one question that he asked that I didn't have a good answer for (because I didn't want to get into a scripture verse argument after my answer), was "If you went to the gates of heaven and St. Peter asked you "Why should I let you in?" What would you say?" I know the answer is "because Jesus died for me, so I live for him" (I have also heard because I believe in Jesus, was baptized, and repented) but how would I defend against the following questions related to "why don't you only follow Jesus than" I hope this is enough information.

A: The simple answer would be, "I have been a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ." You could then go on to explain to your Baptist friend what this means.

- You have accepted God's freely given grace and come to believe in God's word.
- You made a commitment to live your life according to God's word in both its written (Sacred Scripture) and oral (Holy Tradition) forms.
- You have been faithful to the Church that Christ himself established – the Catholic Church – and have availed yourself of the ordinary means of accessing God's grace – the Liturgy and Sacraments – that Christ himself established.
- You have grown in virtue as the grace of God has healed (from sin), strengthened (against sin), transformed (to be more Christlike) and unified (to Christ and his Body – The Church) you.

Your Baptist friend's follow-up question assumes that you are following something other than Christ. In other words, he is attacking what he perceives to be "man-made" traditions of the Catholic Church. The key for your Baptist friend is helping him to recognize that Christ established his Church on Peter (see Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:15-20; Luke 10:16; Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-19; etc...). You will also need to make it clear to him that Sola Scriptura is a false teaching – an innovation that was invented in the 16th century by the Protestant revolutionaries. To debunk Sola Scriptura here is a detailed argument that should also support the rationale for Christ creating a Church that was empowered to interpret, defend, and share the faith so that all mankind could learn to love God and love neighbor as himself.

Support For Tradition:

- “I commend you because you remember me in everything and **maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you.**” 1 Corinthians 11:2
- “So then, brethren, 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
- “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the **tradition that you received** from us.” 2 Thessalonians 3:6
- “But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!” But they have not all heeded the gospel; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So, **faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.**” Romans 10:14-17
- “First of all, you must understand this, that **no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation**, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” 2 Peter 1:20-21 (*indicates a magisterial office is required for interpretation*)
- “...speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them **hard to understand**, which the ignorant and unstable **twist to their own destruction**, as they do the other scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:16 21 (*indicates a magisterial office is required for interpretation*)
- “And he said to them, “Go into all the world and **preach the gospel to the whole creation.** He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:15–16

The Problems with the traditional Sola Scriptura proof texts:

- “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - Only the OT scriptures existed when this was written. Does that mean Protestant’s only need the Old Testament?
 - “All” is not “Only.” Many protestants read “Only” into that verse when it is just saying something we would agree with as Catholics – All Scripture is profitable. That does not mean that only scripture is profitable.
- “I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another...” 1 Corinthians 4:6
 - Ignores context - Paul chastising for dissention / factions.
 - Little of New Testament was written - what was he referring to?
 - Interpretation conflicts with several other Pauline writings so it CAN’T be referring to Sacred Scripture
- “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the

words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” Revelation 22:18-19

- “This book” – not referring to the Bible but this book of the Bible – there are 73 books in the literary library that is the Bible. This is simply saying not to add anything to this specific book.
- *“The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Acts 17:10-11*
 - What Scriptures? OT again!
 - Messianic Prophecy – Paul was teaching how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament messianic prophecies and was commending the Bereans for going back to the Old Testament to verify what he was saying.
- *“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” Deuteronomy 4:2*
 - Talking about Mosaic Law here.
 - This is last book of the Law – What about the other 41 books of the OT that followed it.
- *“And he said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ 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 7:6-9*
 - Talking about “Traditions of Men” – we agree. The specific tradition was a violation of the 4th Commandment – you could choose to not support your parents in their old age as long as you gave your money to the Synagogue.

You could make that case even stronger by highlighting the following points:

- Jesus spent **three years ORALLY teaching** (Jesus wrote nothing) and preparing His Apostles before his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension in **AD 33**
- While six of the Apostles (counting Paul) and at least three others went on to write the twenty-seven books of the New Testament between **AD 50-100** – the **early Christians (33 AD to 100 AD) learned everything through oral tradition** as there was no New Testament (or perceived need for one)
- The 73 books of the Catholic Bible (OT and NT) were clearly identified by the end of the **2nd century through Catholic Tradition!**
- The Canon of the Bible was official defined in local ecumenical councils (Hippo and Rome) in the **4th century – Catholic Tradition Defined The Canon!**
- To undermine the value of Tradition is to undermine the content of the Bible itself.
Professing Sola Scriptura requires a belief in Tradition.
- Sola Scriptura was **not possible until the 15th Century (printing press a pre-requisite)**
 - Illiteracy – the majority of the world’s population was illiterate until the printing press made mass production of books possible and cost effective.

- Unavailability / Expense of Bibles (John 21:25) – until the printing press was invented the cost of a collection of books like the Bible would have put owning a complete set out of the reach of all but the super-rich.
- People learned more from Sola “Pictura” than anything else prior to the rise of literacy.

If you can help him see the fallacy of Sola Scriptura, he should naturally recognize the necessity of Christ’s Church. At that point, his follow-up question loses any force and you have helped him see the reality that the Church was given to us to help us get to those gates he wants you to be prepared for.

Q: My question is in regards to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the resulting potential for desecration to our Lord. Is there any theological speculation that, in a situation where our Lord's body would be desecrated in the Eucharist (whether maliciously or just carelessly), Jesus might remove his presence from the host or wine in this situation? For example, from being (God forbid) thrown in the trash somehow, or even (God further forbid) as part of a black mass.

A: Let’s talk about what the Eucharist is. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us, “In the institution narrative, the power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, **make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ's body and blood**, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all.” ([CCC 1353](#)) We also read that, “In the most blessed sacrament of **the Eucharist the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ** and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained. This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, **it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.**” ([CCC 1374](#)) Therefore, we know that the Eucharist is indeed Christ from the moment of consecration until the accidents of bread and wine no longer exist.

God is all powerful and just as through the power of the Holy Spirit God can transubstantiate the bread and wine into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ, God could also reverse this action. In other words, it’s logically possible. However, when God chose to become incarnate, suffer, and die for us on the Cross; he did not choose to separate his divine nature from his human nature to avoid the pain and suffering that he was subjected to. Rather, Christ turned that experience into the ultimate act of redemptive suffering.

While I do not see a great deal of speculation related to your question (I could not find any), I think we can look to Christ’s decision to remain fully present on the Cross as a precedent for how he would handle accidental or deliberate desecration of a consecrated host. If Christ was willing to undergo the suffering of the Cross, it seems logical that he would also be willing to undergo the humiliation of desecration. In this way we play a role in our own salvation as we are called upon to do everything we can to prevent this type of desecration from occurring. All this is just speculation, but I think the logic and Christ’ own precedent support it.

Q: A Protestant friend of mine says the Catholic Church is a denomination, and that there are actually 240 Catholic denominations, I say no. How should I respond?

A: The simple reply would be, “No. The Catholic church is the only Church that was founded by Christ himself. All other Christian ecclesial communities (Protestants) were founded by men starting 500 years ago starting with Martin Luther, John Calvin, Henri Zwingli and King Henry VIII.” I would go on to point out that:

- Christ clearly founded his Church with Peter as its earthly head and promised it would not fail when he said, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and **on this rock I will build my church**, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)
- Christ doubled down on giving Peter the power to govern in his place when he said, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and **whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**” (Matthew 16:19)
- Christ tripled down on identifying Peter as the earthly head of the Church when he said, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but **I have prayed for you** that your faith may not fail; and **when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.**” (Luke 22:31-32)
- Finally, Christ confirmed Peter’s role after his denial and prior to his ascension when he stated, “‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘**Feed my lambs.**’ A second time he said to him, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘**Tend my sheep.**’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ And he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘**Feed my sheep.**’” (John 21:15-17)
- Having clearly established the papacy as the seat of authority and unity of his Church, Christ also prayed very specifically that the Church would remain one so that all would believe in him through that demonstrated unity when he offered this prayer to his Father, “**I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**” (John 17:20-21)

The protestant reformation was really a deformation of Christ’s Church that resulted in the creation of countless ecclesial communities (number grows each year) that bring us farther and farther away from the unity that Christ prayed for so that all could come to believe in him. There is one, holy, Catholic (universal in scope and fullness of the truth), and apostolic Church – the Catholic Church founded by Christ himself in 33 AD. The other Christian ecclesial communities are not Churches established by Christ but deformations of Christ’s Church that exist in direct opposition to Christ stated desire that there would be only the one Church he established – The Catholic Church.

Through 03/25/24

Q: I’ve been thinking about this lately, it’s a question that sometimes I feel like I understand and sometimes maybe I forgot or it’s that I haven’t fully grasped it. There’s a few parts so I appreciate your patience in advance.

- **Why did Jesus have to die for our sins?**
- **There were some people in the Bible that were taken by God and did not see my death from my understanding (Enoch and Elijah) and Mary thought she did not have that original sin. How did they make it to be in the presence of God if Jesus had not died for them yet?**
- **Then we have purgatory which is supposed to be cleansing. Why is cleansing through purgatory not enough for our sins? Also why is purgatory still required if Jesus already died and paid the price for our sins? Did he only pay part of the price?**
- **In addition to that I recently started thinking about how hell is an eternal consequence for a finite amount of sin. Since a human typically only lives on average 80 years old. Would it not be merciful to have someone pay for their sins a specific amount of time then annihilate them? I think about annihilation as going to sleep without dreaming when you are unaware of your existence. It seems better than an eternity of pain and suffering.**

I recognize that His ways of thinking are not our ways of thinking, and that some of these questions may be up to God only to know. Thanks for your time and please pray for me as I seek to learn how to love God in spite of all these questions that cause me turmoil.

A: There is a lot here but let's take it piece by piece.

1. Jesus did not have to die for our sins. God could have chosen any means he wanted to free us from the infinite sin of our first parents rejecting God. However, being a good Father, he knows that to simply give one's children something automatically devalues it. Instead, God wanted humanity to participate in its own salvation and hence God became man so that there could be an infinite man (a God-Man) capable of compensating for an infinite offense (any offense against an infinitely good being would be an infinite offense). God understands we are material-spiritual beings to whom reality is perceived through our senses. By witnessing the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus our senses are activated and the salvific power of those actions become real to us. Again, God could have done it any way he wanted, but this way was certainly fitting.
2. God exists outside of time. He can choose to apply his salvific gift to anyone he wants at any point in time as that salvific action is always present for him as are all actions. God is not bound by time – he experiences everything that ever did and will happen in our temporal world all at once. Hence, he can choose to apply his salvific gift at any point to anyone – this is what he did with Mary who was immaculately conceived. As for Elijah and Enoch we don't know for sure they are in heaven, but we do see indications that is the case. Again – God is not bound by anything being all powerful and outside of time, so he could choose to do anything he wants with any of his Children.
3. Purgatory is a cleansing to remove any remnant of attachment to sin that we have not successfully overcome in this life. It is also a means of ensuring justice if we have temporal punishment still due for sins (confession relieves the guilt of sin but not the satisfaction required by justice for our sinful acts). Purgatory is a great gift to us. If we die in God's friendship – free of the guilt of mortal sin – purgation is a process that God uses to make us perfect so that we can live with him in heaven (everyone that goes through purgation will enter heaven – no exceptions).

4. Christ paid the eternal price for our sins as all sins are an infinite offense against God. It is Christ's merits that absolve us from our sins through confession, but we must still make satisfaction for the temporal damage done through our sins. We do that either by directly compensating the one(s) we have hurt or through corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Any balance due at the end of life is paid through purgation which also serves to cleanse us of any attachments (inclinations) to sin that remain in us.
5. Hell is a choice we make. It is our remaining steadfast in our rejection of God until death. At that point our wills are fixed. We get this apprenticeship on earth to determine our will, but upon our death it is fixed. If we die having rejected God, there is nothing that can change that. Being in God's presence would be something we could not bear even though we would also know that only God can eternally satisfy us. In essence, the pain of hell is knowing the only thing that you absolutely cannot stand is also the one thing that would make you happy. Even knowing that, one in hell still rejects God as that person's will is fixed. You can make the argument (and many Theologians do) that hell is the best option for someone in that state. Annihilation is the total lack of being and that would be far worse than a painful existence in hell. Eternal existence in hell is a far greater good than a total lack of existence. It is indeed the most merciful solution and another demonstration of God's love for us – even those that reject him.

Q: Here is a question I often go back and forth on. Why is it that from the time we are born, we are in need of God's grace? I understand the concept of original sin. That it was passed down from the beginning. I'm more wondering in the perspective that from the time we are born, we are enemies of God, sort of damned from the start. Knowing that it doesn't matter what we do in our life we cannot ever achieve salvation on our own. Then we have Jesus who died from our sins. I guess I'm just trying to understand more. I think of, if we didn't have Jesus we would all be born and just be destined for hell because of our sinful origin. We are to see Jesus as the biggest gift. Just my heart can't stop thinking, "God had to give us Jesus otherwise we would all be born knowing that we're heading straight to hell after death no matter what we do." I guess I'm just looking for more information regarding this to be able to change my perspective. To see Jesus as a gift rather than something God had to give us otherwise our whole existence would be suffering here and suffering in the afterlife, because even if we tried to do everything right we wouldn't be able to because we can't be perfect. Thank you

A: There seems to be several misconceptions here that need to be addressed.

7. "Original Sin" is not something that was "passed down" and we all carry with us as much as it is a deprivation of original holiness and justice (sanctifying grace) that God had given our first parents that was above our nature. By rejecting God, our first parents rejected this gift and hence we no longer have access to it. This means we lost the ability of our reason to consistently control our passions and hence we suffer from concupiscence – a desire to sin (to choose against God). So "Original Sin" is a lack of something not something we have. You can read about that in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 396-412](#).
8. We are not enemies of God. Rather, as soon as our first parents rejected God, he demonstrated his love for us in that despite this rejection he turned around and promised an even better end state for us than we had in Eden. He promised us a savior

(see [Genesis 3:15](#)). We think of our first parent's failure as a "Happy Fault." Had they not failed we would have essentially remained in the childlike state our first parents existed in completely dependent upon God for everything. Because they fell, we have been given an even greater opportunity to grow and mature and reach the level of perfection necessary to live with God in heaven.

9. We are not damned to hell at birth. God gives all humans the natural law embedded in our souls as a sort of "compass" that allows us to navigate the world and choose the good. Prior to Christ's salvific act many people did follow this natural law compass and lived righteous lives. Upon death, the righteous did not go to the hell of damnation, but rather the place of the dead waiting for the Savior to arrive and open the gates of heaven. We see Jesus himself talk about this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:19-31](#)).
10. We can not be made ready to enter heaven without God's grace as we must be perfect to enter heaven ([Matthew 5:48](#), [Revelation 21:27](#)), but we can live righteous lives and avoid the hell of damnation. We have the ability through God's grace, to reach that state of perfection in this life. If we fail to do so, but remain in friendship with God (free of unabsolved mortal sin), God will make us perfect after we die through the purgation process so that we can enter heaven.

With those points made, let's dig into your dilemma a bit more. God created us to live in love with him. Everything we have, including our very lives, is a free gift from God. We do not deserve these gifts and there is nothing we can do to earn them. Since God exists outside of time, he knew our first parents would fail and his ultimate plan for our salvation and life with him in heaven was the plan from the very beginning. When the fullness of time arrived, and the world was prepared to accept the fullness of God's revelation of who he is (A good Father) and who we are (Beloved sons and daughters) he sent his only (and eternally begotten) Son to show us the way that humanity could take to become the perfect beings we must be to enter eternal life with God in heaven.

God's plan always included our ultimate salvation through his son and the sacrifice he made. God never damned us to a life of suffering and eternal punishment. He allows us to choose that by rejecting him, but he gives us the gifts we need to make that choice. He then goes a step further and gives us sanctifying grace through the Liturgy and Sacraments so we can rise above our nature and live in heaven with him. We simply need to accept the free gift of that grace. Jesus came to teach us this and establish his Church to be the ordinary vehicle through which this grace is accessed.

Q: Is mass indiscriminate deportation of all illegal immigrant's contrary to the common good or human dignity? Is there an exist a Catholic argument against such a policy by natural moral or divine law?

A: The Catholic position on immigration is clearly defined in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in CCC 2241 as follows: **"The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him.** Political

authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, **may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions**, especially with regard to the immigrants' duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens." In addition, the USCCB's (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) Faithful Citizen Guide ([Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#)) states:

"The Gospel mandate to "welcome the stranger" requires Catholics to care for and stand with newcomers, authorized and unauthorized, including unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, those unnecessarily detained, and victims of human trafficking. Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system and should include a broad and fair legalization program with a path to citizenship; a work program with worker protections and just wages; family reunification policies; access to legal protections, which include due process procedures; refuge for those fleeing persecution and violence; and policies to address the root causes of migration. The right and responsibility of nations to control their borders and to maintain the rule of law should be recognized but pursued in a just and humane manner. The detention of immigrants should be used to protect public safety and not for purposes of deterrence or punishment; alternatives to detention, including community-based programs, should be emphasized."

The bottom line is that we are obligated as a nation to welcome those who are truly seeking to escape poverty and persecution. Mass deportations would certainly be contrary to the natural law and Catholic teaching. Nations are allowed to secure their borders, and implement policies to ensure safety but that cannot be at the expense of denying the natural rights of all humans to seek a better life for themselves and their family.

Q: Is it proper to pray and hope for earthly or material goods like a good grade on an exam, a good job, etc. What exactly is the prosperity gospel, and when does this petition for earthly well being bleed into it?

A: You can certainly pray for any material need you have. God will answer all your prayers. Sometimes he will say, "Yes!" Sometimes he will say, "No!" Sometimes he will say "Not now." The bottom line is God has a providential plan that has the best possible eternal outcome for all of us individually and collectively. His plan cannot be improved upon so if fulfilling the material desire is aligned with that plan you will see it fulfilled.

Prayer is primarily a means of aligning our wills to God's (which again is the best possible eternal outcome for us). In prayer we can offer our petitions for our material needs and those of others, but we should always do so while asking God for the grace to see his will fulfilled and to be able to embrace that plan. We must have faith that his plan is always the best plan even when we cannot see that ourselves. For example, we may not want to fail the exam, but in allowing us to do so God is allowing us to learn valuable lessons that will benefit us in this life and the next (e.g., we can grow in the virtues of perseverance, fortitude, temperance, etc...) and/or help us understand that the path we are on is not the best path for us.

This [TRANSCRIPT](#) from one of Trent Horn's "Counsel of Trent" podcasts give an excellent overview of the history and bankrupt (pun intended) nature of the prosperity Gospel. Rather than repeat what Trent says, I would suggest you read the transcript or listen to the podcast as it answers your questions fully.

Q: Hello, my question is this. Can I still receive the sacraments even if my [spouse]'s previous marriage is not annulled by the Church? [Spouse] is divorced in the civil courts and is a protestant, I came to the knowledge of the church last year while still happily married for 3 years, though my [spouse] is an anti-Catholic. I wanted to ask this because this has been the reason why I hesitate to try and go through my parishes' RCIA out of fear that I won't be able to partake in the sacraments.

A: The Church assumes that all marriages are valid until it demonstrated otherwise. The basis for this is Christ's own words, *"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone 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](#)) Later in Matthew's Gospel Jesus doubles down on this teaching in a dialog with the Pharisees pointing out that divorce was not part of God's original plan:

"And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' He answered, '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.' They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery.'" ([Matthew 19:3-19](#))

Jesus' teaching is clear. If a marriage was entered into by the spouses freely (neither party was coerced in any way), with the intention of giving to each other fully (nothing about each other was held back and there was an intention to share everything moving forward), with a lifetime commitment to fidelity (a clear intention to stay faithful throughout the marriage) and an openness to being fruitful (participating with God in the creation of life) than it is a valid marriage and only God himself could dissolve it. If at the time the marriage was attempted one or more of these conditions was not in place or, if one or more of the spouses was Baptized Catholic but did not receive permission of the local Bishop to marry outside the Church (Baptized Catholics are bound to marry in a Church by Canon Law), then one can seek a declaration of nullity indicating that the marriage was never validly entered into.

This means that from the Church's perspective your spouse's first marriage remains intact as of this moment. Hence, your marriage to her was invalid and, assuming you are living as married people do, you are committing adultery. As a result, you are correct in assuming that your spouse's first marriage would need to be annulled and your marriage be convalidated in the Catholic Church (a very simple procedure) before you could be fully received into the Church and receive the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism [which you may already have], Confirmation and the Eucharist). **This does not mean that you could not start the RCIA / OCIA process, and in doing so,**

begin to work with your parish priest to investigate the possibility of getting a declaration of nullity for your spouse's first marriage. Depending upon the circumstances that were in place when that marriage was entered into it may not be as difficult as you and your spouse could be assuming.

Assuming, you have concluded that the Catholic Church is the Church Christ founded and that it possesses the fullness of Christ's truth, not pursuing this path would be putting your soul in jeopardy. If you know the truth and do not act on it that would be gravely sinful. I would recommend that you and your spouse meet with your parish priest to discuss it. It would be a great opportunity to dig into the anti-Catholic feelings. In my experience, 99.9% of the time those feelings arise from misinformation and simply asking a few questions and getting some facts can be quite eye opening.

Q: I was recently watching the show The Chosen and saw their depiction of the Samaritan woman at the well. Obviously the show is entertainment and not Scripture, but it did get me thinking. Jesus says "salvation is from the Jews," and the Jews are consistently referred to throughout the Bible as "God's Chosen People." So why did God seemingly pick out a random nation and give them special attention and seemingly neglect non-Hebrews until the coming of Christ?

A: Let's start by digging into what it means when Jesus says, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews." ([John 4:22](#)) Jesus is pointing out to the Samaritan woman that it is the Jewish people (whom the Samaritans descended from – the ten Northern tribes) that are to help mankind come into relationship with God. As one of my favorite commentaries states it:

*"Salvation is from the Jews. Jesus, the savior of the world, is a Jew. Distinguishing the Samaritans ("you people") from the Jews, Jesus identifies himself as a Jew and aligns himself with his people ("we"). The Scriptures attest that God chose Israel, also called Jacob, and entered into covenant with them, so that the people Israel might show forth his holiness and serve his purposes, bringing blessing and salvation to the whole world. God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that "in your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing" (Gen 26:4; see 12:3; 28:14). In Isa 49, when the Lord speaks of his future act of salvation, he declares to his Servant, the personification of his people Israel: "I will make you a light to the nations [Gentiles, or non-Jews], / that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6). After a long time of preparation, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4:4), a Jewish woman, and thus the salvation of the entire world comes in Jesus, a descendant of Abraham and child of Israel. Through Jesus, God fulfills his covenantal promises of salvation to Israel and brings the Gentiles to himself, giving them access to the salvation and blessing promised "to Abraham and to his descendants forever" (Luke 1:55; see Gal 3:26–29)." (Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic; 2015; pgs. 86–87)*

God was not being "partial" to the Jewish people. He was choosing a people to train in holiness so that they would be prepared to bring the Good News of salvation to the rest of the world in the fullness of time. ([Galatians 4:4-7](#)) God was not "neglecting" everyone else while he was working to bring the Jewish people into relationship with him through successive covenants –

Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. God implants the moral compass that is the natural law within all men's hearts and gives humanity a world to live in that is ripe with markers of his existence. Humanity had to mature to the point that it could be prepared intellectually, socially, and morally to accept the final revelations of who God is and who we were meant to be. The Jewish people were to be the vehicle to bring that news to the world.

All of the early Christians were Jewish. The spread of Christianity was so successful because the Jews that had been scattered around the globe served as fertile ground for this extension of the Jewish faith. The Jewish people paid a heavy price for being chosen to be the vehicle through which God would make himself fully known to the world. They were held to a higher moral standard than their neighbors, and when they failed, they suffered as they had been given knowledge of God that others did not have.

The bottom line is that the Jewish people were not "chosen" to be given advantages and special treatment. Rather, the Jewish people were to be the representatives of all humanity that would come to know God intimately and be prepared to bring that knowledge to others. In other words, they were chosen to be the servants of humanity as the vehicle through which the Good News could be spread.

Q: What is the faiths' standpoint on lgbtqia+ peoples?

A: Let's start with some basics on who we are as humans. We read in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) that, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. Man occupies a unique place in creation: (I) he is in the image of God; (II) in his own nature he unites the spiritual and material worlds; (III) he is created male and female; (IV) God established him in his friendship...Of all visible creatures only man is able to know and love his creator. He is the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake...this is the fundamental reason for his dignity...the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other people. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead." ([CCC 355-357](#)) This means that:

1. All human beings are beloved sons and daughters of God.
2. Humans are endowed with the gifts of intellect and will that allow us to come to know God and choose whether to love him.
3. Our sexuality is complementary – men and women are equal in dignity but given different strengths and skills that are designed to complement one another.
4. We are called into a relationship with God and each other in a means aligned with his design.

We also read in the Catechism that because of original sin we now suffer from, "...a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin - an inclination to evil that is called concupiscence." ([CCC 405](#)) This means we are all attracted to actions that are outside of God's design for our flourishing and we must work to grow in virtue and self-control so we can avoid the sin we are attracted to. God offers his grace through the Liturgy and Sacraments to help us do that.

The attraction to sinful sexual acts is amongst the most common form of concupiscence. The attraction to these sins in and of itself is not sinful. It is engaging in acts of this nature that is gravely sinful. We are all called to live a life of chastity that is appropriate for our vocation (single, married, religious). “Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman.” ([CCC 2337](#))

There are many offenses against chastity outlined in the Catechism including lust, masturbation, fornication, pornography, prostitution, rape, and homosexuality (see [CCC 2351-2359](#)). These acts are all gravely sinful and those attracted to them must work to resist that attraction with the help of God's grace. As you can see these grave sexual sins are plagues that both heterosexual and same sex attracted individuals must overcome.

All this means that the Church's position on those that identify as members of the LGBTQQIP2SAA+ community is that they are just as much beloved sons and daughters of God as those that consider themselves outside of that community. We are not defined by our attraction to various sins – our dignity is based upon being created by God in his image and likeness. Sexual sin of all types are gravely sinful, and when engaged in with full knowledge and consent serve to separate us from God. The Church wants to help those within and outside of the LGBTQQIP2SAA+ community overcome their concupiscence so they can live out the plan that God has for their lives.

Unfortunately, many both within and outside of the Catholic faith have a misunderstanding of Catholic teaching in this arena. This misunderstanding can lead the misinformed to treat those who suffer from attraction to the sins associated with the LGBTQQIP2SAA+ community differently than they would treat those who suffer from attraction to sexual sins that heterosexuals are more closely associated with (in many cases both groups are attracted to the same sin – e.g., sodomy within the context of marriage is just as grave as the homosexual act of the same nature). The Church is very clear in its teachings regarding those that are same sex attracted and that teaching can be extended to all members of the LGBTQQIP2SAA+ community. That teaching states 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. 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](#))

Q: Why must we as humans suffer? What does the Bible tell us about suffering?

A: The problem of evil has been a challenge for those that believe in the one true God forever. The problem is addressed in what many consider to be the first book of the Bible ever written – Job – indicating just how important and difficult this issue is.

The classic question is, “How can an all good and powerful God allow the innocent to experience evil (pain and suffering)?” Many people come to one of three conclusions and determine that God is either:

- Not all good,

- Not all powerful, or
- He does not exist!

The Catechism expands on this basic question and offers some answers in [CCC 309-312](#). The bottom-line answer is found in CCC 312 which states, “In time we can discover that **God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil**, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures: ‘It was not you,’ said Joseph to his brothers, ‘who sent me here, but God.... You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.’ **From the greatest moral evil ever committed—the rejection and murder of God’s only Son, caused by the sins of all men—God, by his grace that ‘abounded all the more,’ brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption.** But for all that, evil never becomes a good.”

Even physical evils – earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, floods, disease, etc... – while bringing tremendous pain and suffering also bring great good. How many times have we all seen that when disaster hits people show up and help those they have never met. People donate their time, talent, and treasure to help others they do not know. The Evil provides an opportunity for humans to exercise virtue and demonstrate unconditional love of neighbor. Sometimes the scale of this is so massive that the good created clearly outweighs the evil even in our own finite view of events. St. Paul may have characterized this best when he wrote, “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.” ([Romans 5:3-5](#))

In 1984, Pope Saint John Paul II, wrote a document entitled [Salvifici Doloris](#) that explores human suffering and offers an answer for its presence. This was a man that experienced a level of personal suffering (e.g., death of his family, persecution by the Nazis, assassination attempt, debilitating Parkinson’s disease, etc...) that was much more than most, yet his view of suffering was one of love, humility, and transformation. If you want to get a good understanding of how God allows evil to create a greater good this apostolic letter may be the most thoughtful and beautiful response ever produced.

When Jesus came, he did not come to put an end to all suffering in this life – he healed some but not all. He used his healing as signs of the forgiveness of sins and his own divinity. While God does not relish our suffering in this life, he is more concerned with this life giving us an opportunity to prepare for the next and become masters of unconditional love. Very often, it is suffering that helps us (and those around us who witness that suffering) do just that by making us humble enough to accept God’s help or virtuous enough to express God’s love to others.

The key is understanding that this life is just an apprenticeship for what is to come. As a result, in the grand scheme of things this life has very little to no lasting meaning beyond our ability to use it to learn how to love God and love others like he loves us. Sometimes, by taking away the challenges that this life presents, we can be making it more difficult for those we are trying to help become the “masters” (that is what an apprentice who graduates is called) we are called to

be. In that case our desire to show mercy in the short term, which can sometimes appear to far outweigh God's own mercy, is actually doing a disservice to those we are trying to help.

Through 03/18/24

Q: Why is it that all sins are equal? What does God see that a lot of us struggle with?

A: All sins are not equal. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches us, "Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin...Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it." ([CCC 1854-1855](#)) In order for a sin to reach the gravity of being a mortal sin three conditions must be met. "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." ([CCC 1857](#)). We are further told that, "Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man..." ([CCC 1858](#))

The key to understanding this is having a firm grasp on the meaning of the ten commandments. For example, the fifth commandment is commonly stated as, "You shall not kill." This does not just mean there is a prohibition on causing the physical death of someone. It extends to physical damage as well as emotional and spiritual damage. As a result, making fun of someone to the extent that it results in psychological or social damage to them is a violation of the fifth commandment. The same is true of all the commandments. For example, the sixth commandment expressly prohibits adultery, but it has been understood as a prohibition on any sexual act outside of a sacramental marriage or an act within a marriage that is not ordered to the unity of the spouse and procreation of children. If you are interested in seeing a list of common grave sins you can find one [HERE](#).

God is aware of all our struggles. He knows that we are broken and that each of us suffers from a form of concupiscence. Some of us struggle with attachment to power or wealth or sexual pleasures. Most humans, struggle with some form of sexual sin but no two people struggle with the same exact set of temptations. [CCC 1426](#) tells us, "...the new life received in Christian initiation (through our Baptism, Confirmation and first reception of Communion) has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life." This is why God gave us the Sacraments – especially reconciliation and the Eucharist – so that we have a means of accessing his grace to heal when we fail and gain strength to avoid sinning in the future. By accepting God's grace we can overcome our own brokenness, grow in virtue, and destroy our attachment to the sins that plague us.

Q: Am I permitted to disagree with the USCCB’s policy proposals such as full-scale ban on rifles or increase in minimum wage?

A: I am not sure where you are finding this USCCB policy on the ban on rifles or an increase in the minimum wage. The updated “[Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#)” does talk about a ban on assault weapons and providing a just wage but does not mention a ban on rifles or a necessary increase in minimum wage. I would like to see what documents you are referencing on both those fronts.

That said, there are five levels of Church teaching as found in the table below. While Catholics are required to provide their assent to Dogmatic and Doctrinal teachings. Non-Doctrinal statements or opinions that are offered by the Magisterium or members of it (e.g., the USCCB is a group of members of the Magisterium) do not require Magisterial assent. They should be received with respect, but when it comes to topics that require prudential judgment (e.g., means of ensuring immigration policy is aligned with Catholic teaching), the catholic faithful are free to come to a prudential judgment that disagrees with its leadership as long as it does not violate Doctrinal teachings.

Level	Source	Type of Assent Required
<i>Dogma</i>	God (Scripture & Tradition)	Assent of Theological Faith - requires an act of the will, not merely an act of the intellect.
<i>Doctrine – Infallible</i>	Magisterium Acting Officially	Firm and Definitive Assent - We recognize the infallible nature of the teaching and work to come to an intellectual Recognition of these definitive truths.
<i>Doctrine – Mutable</i>	Magisterium Acting Officially	Religious Submission of Will and Intellect - We submit to the authority that Christ established for His Church.
<i>Non-Doctrinal Statements</i>	Members of the Magisterium Acting As Individuals	Received With Respect & Gratitude BUT Does NOT Require Assent
<i>Theological Opinions</i>	Clergy, Theologians / Catechists	None Required

Q: Should I say grace over my dog's meals?

A: Saying grace before meals is a practice rooted in the Christian tradition of giving thanks to God for the food we are about to receive or have just taken. This act of gratitude is a way to acknowledge our dependence on God for life, express gratitude for the gifts of creation, recognize those who provide us with food through their labor, and show solidarity with those in need. The word "grace" in this context means thanksgiving, reflecting the idea of expressing gratitude to God for His bounty in providing for our basic human needs. The obligation of thanksgiving, exemplified by Jesus in the Bible, has been emphasized in the Christian tradition from the early days. Various historical Christian documents and early Church Fathers mention

the practice of giving thanks to God before and after meals, highlighting the importance of this act of gratitude in Christian life. Therefore, saying grace before meals is a way to show appreciation to God for His provision, recognize the labor of those involved in food production, and express solidarity with others, as encouraged by the Church.

That said, saying a prayer of thanksgiving over the food that you are providing for your dog would take on the same meaning. You are simply thanking God for giving you the means of providing for another of his creatures. Your prayer of grace at mealtime could simply be expanding to include all the food that members of the household (human or animal life) will be partaking in.

Q: Is it proper to argue your way to someone why Christianity and specific Catholicism, is true through human reasoning? Aquinas seems to think that it's rather the Holy Spirit that converts someone into the faith according to this video: <https://youtu.be/KO69YzMlv9s?si=t7esMLVuoldl4rC1> . So is it improper to evangelize the faith by apologetics.

A: The Catholic faith is clear that only through the grace of God can someone be brought to faith. One can educate or work themselves into faith. That said, how God decides to offer that grace is up to him. One method is certainly through the evangelical, catechetical, and apologetic efforts of other members of the Body of Christ. God loves to work through us, his children, to accomplish his providential plan. Humans are often used by God as the delivery mechanism through which his grace is offered. A great example of that is found in our seven Sacraments.

On top of that Jesus gave a clear command when he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)) Finally, St. Peter offered us some great direction when he said, "**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](#))

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) provides us with some strong advice as well when it says, "Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, **the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men.**" ([CCC 848](#)) We also read that, "Lay people ... fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life...This witness of life, however, is not the sole element in the apostolate; **the true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers . . . or to the faithful....Lay people who are capable and trained may also collaborate in catechetical formation, in teaching the sacred sciences, and in use of the communications media.**" ([CCC 905-906](#))

The bottom line is that we all must be open to being vehicles of God's grace so that he can leverage the gifts that he has given each of us to foster to progress of his Kingdom on earth.

Q: I had an Orthodox make a comment on triple immersion. Can you help me understand that better and why it's not necessary any more? "Firstly, if the Didache instructs Christians without access to living water or any type of water to baptize by pouring thrice upon the head (as was preserved normatively in some ancient Russian baptismal formulas and as is done frequently in monasteries such as Visoki Dečani), it implies that the normative practice would consist of triple full immersions. Secondly, in regards to your second point, whether Jesus Christ's words in Mt 28:19 constitute a baptismal formula, it still wouldn't affect the question. The passages in Acts, "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38; 10:48), and "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16; 19:5), are not baptismal formulas but signify the confession of Christ with all that Christ stands for, namely, the fullness of the Triune God and His salvation. Thirdly, the Early Fathers testify to the apostolic practice of triple immersions. Justin Martyr describes baptism as being only understood by triple immersions (Apologia i.61). Tertullian (de corona) says, "Hereupon we are thrice immersed," and in his ad praxem, he instructs that the Lord commanded the Apostles to baptize into the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, not into a unipersonal God, thrice into the Three Persons, at each mention of Their names."

A: You seem to be stating that the instructions on Baptism in the [Didache](#), "...implies that the normative practice would consist of triple full immersions." The Didache's instruction on Baptism are as follows:

*"And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, **in living water**. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and **if you cannot in cold, in warm**. But if you have not either, **pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit**. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before."*

Oddly enough, you have to make a pretty significant assumption to come to the conclusion that full immersion is the normative means of Baptism based upon what it says in the Didache. The Didache clearly states a preference for use of "living" and "cold" water (water that is flowing – e.g., river) but it says nothing about immersion. As a matter of fact, the Didache only mentions the pouring of water explicitly. In addition, when we examine Sacred Scripture we find that there is not one description of the means of Baptism to be found in the Bible. It is only in sacred art that we find depictions of full immersion and that has led many to read into instructions, like those found in the Didache, what they have seen in imagery. That said, even if the Didache did provide specific instructions it would still not be a magisterial document that had any weight to establish a normative means of conferring a sacrament in the Church that Christ established with Peter at its head. The same can be said of any of the writings of the Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr or ecclesial writers like Tertulian.

So let us look at what the Church actually teaches. [The Catechism of the Council of Trent](#) states that Baptism may be administered in three ways - by immersion, infusion, or aspersion - and all are considered valid. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) confirms that the essential rite of Baptism consists of immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on their head while invoking the Most Holy Trinity. The Catechism does tell us that, "Baptism is performed in the most expressive way by triple immersion in the baptismal water. However, from ancient times it has also been able to be conferred by pouring the water three times over the candidate's head." ([CCC 1239](#)) Therefore, the Catechism (a Magisterial Document), while identifying immersion as "the most expressive way", says nothing about it being normative.

As for the Baptismal formula, clearly the instructions given by Christ himself are our best guide. I don't really think you have a question there, but I am not sure as you do mention them.

Q: I understand the purpose of free will and the existence of evil. But we don't have completely free will. For example, we cannot of our own free will fly or perform miracles. So why did God make certain evils even physically possible? For example, abortion or sex change operations. Why would that even be a possibility?

A: You seem to be making an assumption about "Free Will" that I would challenge. "Free Will" is not having universal ability. "Free Will" is the ability to choose to act within the limitations of one's nature. Flying or performing miracles are not things that are within human nature to do so we could not choose to do them any more than a fish could choose to run a marathon. God gave us the ability to choose to do anything that is within our nature – individually and collectively – to do. This, by default means we have the ability to make some incredibly uninformed and decisions that reject the good.

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "**Endowed with a spiritual soul, with intellect and with free will**, the human person is from his very conception ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude. He pursues his perfection in 'seeking and loving what is true and good.'" ([CCC 1711](#)) The Catechism also tells us that, "God created man **a rational being**, conferring on him the **dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions....**Man is rational and therefore like God; he is **created with free will and is master over his acts...**Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility...." ([CCC 1730-1731](#)). Finally, the Catechism informs us that, "**Sins can be distinguished according to their objects**, as can every human act; or according to the virtues they oppose, by excess or defect; or according to the commandments they violate. They can also be classed according to whether they concern God, neighbor, or oneself; they can be divided into spiritual and carnal sins, or again as sins in thought, word, deed, or omission. **The root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will**, according to the teaching of the Lord: 'For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man.' **But in the heart also resides charity, the source of the good and pure works, which sin wounds.**"

The bottom line is that we do indeed have "Free Will" and it is that gift that both allows us to choose acts of great evil and acts of great charity (love). To restrict our ability to choose evil would mean our choices for charity would be "forced" to some degree and that would not be true love – love purely for the good of the other. In order for great love to exist, great evil must be a choice as well. Often, we see them side by side as when a war devastates a region, and others choose to help those in need that they have never met. In situations like that, the choice for evil allowed others to make a choice for good and to grow in virtue.

Q: I am a Nurse Practitioner at a large academic medical center. One of my colleagues who I am "friends" with at work, told me she and her husband are going to use IVF to try to get pregnant. Is it mortal sin if I don't explain the Church's teaching regarding IVF. To my knowledge, the colleague is not religious. Am I obligated to share my beliefs based on my Catholic faith with those who have no faith?

A: The Catholic Church teaches that there is an obligation to administer fraternal correction when certain conditions are met, such as when the delinquency to be corrected is grave, **there**

is a well-founded expectation that the admonition will be heeded, and there is no one else just as well fitted for this work of Christian charity. This obligation of fraternal correction is rooted in the natural law binding us to love and assist one another, as well as in positive precepts like the one given by Christ in [Matthew 18:15-17](#). The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, "...charity demands beneficence and fraternal correction..." ([CCC 1829](#)) In his [2012 Lenten Message](#) Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the importance of fraternal correction for the spiritual well-being of others, stating that it is a forgotten aspect of the Christian life and that failing to offer such correction goes against our spiritual responsibility towards our brothers and sisters.

In light of these teachings, failing to offer fraternal correction when **necessary** can be considered a sin, as it neglects the duty to help others on their spiritual journey and uphold the truth out of love and concern for their well-being. That said, you need to spend some time in discernment to determine if your coworker will receive the correction in the light that it is offered (out of love and concern for her eternal soul). If, as you state, your coworker is not religious it is unlikely they will readily accept the Catholic Moral teaching considering our culture's broad-based acceptance of IVF. In those circumstances, your correction could serve to drive your co-worker even farther away from faith than she already is and the conditions under which fraternal correction should be offered would certainly not exist. It is a prudential judgment that you must make, but leading with correction on a coworker's desperate desire to have children is probably not the best way to begin your evangelization efforts.

What you can do is pray for her and her husband and any of their children that will be killed if they continue with this plan. You can also educate yourself regarding the three reasons why the Catholic Church views IVF as an intrinsic evil: 1) to produce a healthy child several other fertilized embryos (children in the earliest stage of development endowed with an immortal soul) must be killed, 2) introducing a third party (lab technician) into the marital act and eliminating the intimate union of the marital act as a means of producing offspring violates God's design, and 3) commoditizing life objectifies humanity and undermines the dignity of the human person. If asked, you should be able to simply share those three points while recognizing that the pain and suffering that a couple with fertility issues are experiencing can be devastating so they must be shared with the utmost sensitivity. You may also want to educate yourself about [Napro Technology](#) as a viable alternative to IVF (60% of infertile women achieve success through Napro) in the event an opportunity arises where it would be appropriate to share it.

Q: Under what circumstances did missing mass on Sunday become a Mortal sin what year did this happen? Was it a magisterium decision?

A: Thanks for the question. It is a good one. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) outlines the five precepts of the Church in [CCC 2041-2043](#). "The first precept ("You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor") requires the faithful to sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord as well as the principle liturgical feasts." (CCC 2042). Sunday Mass participation became a precept of the Church from nearly the very beginning of Christianity, although it was not prescribed into Church "law" until the need to do so arose. Pope Saint John Paul II briefly described the history behind this decision in his Apostolic Letter, [Dies Domini](#) – On Keeping The Lord's Day Holy, which was issued on May 31, 1998. Here are two paragraphs from that letter that are particularly useful (The whole letter is something every Catholic should read! You won't be sorry if you do):

46. Since the Eucharist is the very heart of Sunday, it is clear why, from the earliest centuries, the Pastors of the Church have not ceased to remind the faithful of the need to take part in the liturgical assembly. **"Leave everything on the Lord's Day", urges the third century text known as the Didascalia, "and run diligently to your assembly, because it is your praise of God. Otherwise, what excuse will they make to God, those who do not come together on the Lord's Day to hear the word of life and feed on the divine nourishment which lasts forever?"**....In his first Apology addressed to the Emperor Antoninus and the Senate (mid second century), Saint Justin proudly described the Christian practice of the Sunday assembly, which gathered in one place Christians from both the city and the countryside. When, during the persecution of Diocletian, their assemblies were banned with the greatest severity, many were courageous enough to defy the imperial decree and accepted death rather than miss the Sunday Eucharist. This was the case of the martyrs of Abitina, in Proconsular Africa, who replied to their accusers: **"Without fear of any kind we have celebrated the Lord's Supper, because it cannot be missed; that is our law"; "We cannot live without the Lord's Supper".** As she confessed her faith, one of the martyrs said: "Yes, I went to the assembly and I celebrated the Lord's Supper with my brothers and sisters, because I am a Christian".

47. Even if **in the earliest times it was not judged necessary to be prescriptive**, the Church has not ceased to confirm this obligation of conscience, which rises from the inner need felt so strongly by the Christians of the first centuries. It was **only later, faced with the half-heartedness or negligence of some, that the Church had to make explicit the duty to attend Sunday Mass**: more often than not, this was **done in the form of exhortation, but at times the Church had to resort to specific canonical precepts**. This was the case in a number of local Councils from the fourth century onwards (as at the **Council of Elvira of 300**, which speaks not of an obligation but of penalties after three absences) and most **especially from the sixth century onwards** (as at the Council of Agde in 506)...**The Code of Canon Law of 1917 for the first time gathered this tradition into a universal law**. The present Code reiterates this, saying that "on Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to attend Mass". **This legislation has normally been understood as entailing a grave obligation**: this is the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and it is easy to understand why if we keep in mind how vital Sunday is for the Christian life.

The bottom line is Jesus gave us very few direct commands: 1) Love God and Neighbor ([Matthew 22:37-39](#); [John 13:34](#)) , 2) Make disciples of all nations and teach them everything I commanded you ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)), 3) Do this (celebrate the Eucharist) in remembrance of me ([Luke 22:14-20](#)). The early Christians understood this without the need for laws and declarations. It was only once the depth of commitment to the faith began to fade that it had to be codified with formal declarations and ultimately written into Canon Law when it was first assembled.

Q: Can you help me understand Baptism of Desire and its validity? I came across this comment from a Sedevacantist and was hoping you can help shed some light with a response: "One of the most common objections I hear when I tell people the truth on the necessity of water baptism is 'God isn't bound by the Sacraments, He can save whoever He wants.' If this were true, then how do we know men don't become priests by their own desire? Or get married "by desire" without actually receiving the sacrament of Matrimony? Isn't that what people who are fornicating and shacking up say? 'We're

basically married, we just haven't gone through the ceremony yet. We're just as committed as anyone who has had the ceremony.' Why doesn't their 'commitment' and 'desire for marriage' constitute real marriage? And if "God isn't bound by the Sacraments" and can do whatever He wants, how could we know that God wasn't making them married simply by their desire? Or making men priests by desire? It's such an absurd statement, and it shows that they don't believe that God has actually revealed who is saved and HOW they are saved. It's all just a big mystery for BOD advocates which allows them to affirm and deny anything they wish about Catholic teaching.

A: Thanks for the question. It gave me a good chuckle. This sedevacantist commentator is confusing God's ability to confer his grace on anyone that he chooses with humans somehow conferring grace upon themselves. His analogy is a very poor one as he is comparing the ability of the all-powerful and loving God to confer his grace on those whom he chooses to humans simply declaring that a grace has been conferred on themselves outside of the ordinary means established by God and his Church.

God is the source of all grace. God created his Church to be the ordinary vehicle through which those graces flow and the sacraments as the sensible means by which we can receive that invisible grace. That said, for the sedevacantist to compare the inability of humans to confer God's grace upon themselves to God choosing to convey grace to the deserving outside of the ordinary means he established is ludicrous. When this poor soul states, "And if 'God isn't bound by the Sacraments' and can do whatever He wants..." it is clear he is assuming that somehow the all-powerful God is bound by the Sacraments and cannot do whatever he wants. That is not the God of the Catholic Church. In fact, that is not a being worthy of the title of God at all.

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) provides a fine overview of the necessity of Baptism in [CCC 1257-1261](#). That section also covers both Baptism of Blood (Martyrs) and Baptism of Desire (Catechumens, the invincibly ignorant that would have pursued Baptism had they known of it). It starts with some very clear statements about what has been universal Church teaching in CCC 1257 which states, "The Lord himself affirms that **Baptism is necessary for salvation**. He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them. 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**. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are 'reborn of water and the Spirit.' God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments." The key is that those, who through no fault of their own, were not aware of the necessity of Baptism and/or were unable to be Baptized, our loving God is not going to condemn them to hell for something they had no control over. It would take a truly evil and unjust God to choose that path.

In Mark 16:16 we read, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." This is a very clear statement that knowledge is required – you cannot believe in anything you are not aware of. At the same time, it is also a very clear statement that those who were given the knowledge and/or had access to it but simply refused to pursue it will be held accountable for that rejection. In other words, invincible ignorance does not automatically condemn you to hell while refusal to acknowledge the truth, once presented, does.

It is the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch (early 2nd century) that the Catechism references in [CCC 2473](#) that speaks to the early Church's understanding of Baptism by Blood. As for Baptism of Desire it became a formal Church teaching shortly after the new world was discovered and it became readily apparent that the majority of the world's population had never heard about Christ. That said, you can go back to Sacred Scripture and the writing of St. Paul who stated, "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." ([Roman 2:14-16](#)) Paul seems to be saying that those who, through no fault of their own, do not follow Christ but do adhere to the natural law written on their hearts, will be saved without Baptism.

The Church has historically taught that God knows (he is God after all) who would have pursued Baptism had they had the knowledge or opportunity and hence will confer the grace of Baptism on them outside the ordinary means – the Sacrament. We see it in the writings of St. Thomas who wrote, "Secondly, the sacrament of baptism may be wanting to anyone in reality but not in desire; for instance, when a man wishes to be baptized but by some ill chance he is forestalled by death before receiving baptism. And such a man can obtain salvation without being actually baptized, on account of his desire for baptism, which desire is the outcome of faith that works by charity, whereby God, whose power is not tied to the visible sacraments, sanctifies man inwardly. Hence Ambrose says of Valentinian, who died while yet a catechumen, 'I lost him whom I was to regenerate, but he did not lose the grace he prayed for'" (Summa Theologia III:68:2, cf. III:66:11–12).

The bottom line is that this sedevacantist commentator is professing a sedevacantist viewpoint which is in error and doing so quite poorly. The logic of the commentator's statements displays a poor understanding of our living God and his analogies fail miserably. He would have done a little better if he stuck with standard sedevacantist arguments on this front, but they are still easily refuted. At least if the commentator had stuck with those classic sedevacantis arguments, he would not have painted a picture of a feeble God incapable of acting beyond the vehicles he established for his Church to convey his grace.

Through 03/11/24

Q: When I am praying to Jesus, is he spiritually present with me?

A: God is always with us. Our very being comes from God so without him we cease to exist. As a matter of fact, if God stopped thinking about us for even a second, we would be gone. God dwells within us in the person of the Holy Spirit, making each of us a tabernacle (tent) of the Lord. As a result, God hears and answers all our prayers. Jesus himself tells us this in [Matthew 7:7-8](#) where he says, “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

This does not mean that God always says “Yes” when he answers our prayers. Sometimes, he says, “Yes”, sometimes, “No” and sometimes “Not Yet.” God is the best of all Fathers – giving us what we need, not necessarily what we want. What we can be sure of is he is with us, he hears us, and because he wants only what is best for us for eternal life that the answer we get to our prayers will always result in the best possible plan for us individually and collectively (as a member of Christ’s Body).

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us in [CCC 2740-2741](#) that, “The prayer of Jesus makes Christian prayer an efficacious petition. He is its model, he prays in us and with us... Jesus also prays for us - in our place and on our behalf. All our petitions were gathered up, once for all, in his cry on the Cross and, in his Resurrection, heard by the Father. This is why he never ceases to intercede for us with the Father. If our prayer is resolutely united with that of Jesus, in trust and boldness as children, we obtain all that we ask in his name, even more than any particular thing: the Holy Spirit himself, who contains all gifts.”

Q: For identical twins in the womb, when does life begin for them. Are they one person at conception? Where does ensoulment happen for the two individuals?

A: The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us in [CCC 366](#) that, “The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not ‘produced’ by the parents...” Since we also read in [CCC 2270](#) that, “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence...,” we know that it is at the moment of conception when a human life first begins to exist that God creates the soul for that human life.

According to the National Institute of Health (See This [ARTICLE](#)), “Monozygotic twins derive from a single zygote that undergoes division at varying stages of development, the timing of which ultimately determines placental sharing. Morula stage (days 1–4) division results in dichorionic-diamniotic twins that cannot be differentiated from dizygotic (two eggs fertilized) twins in utero. Blastocyst stage (days 4–8) division results in monochorionic-diamniotic twins. Division at the 8–12-day stage results in monochorionic-monoamniotic twins, and division after day 12 leads to conjoined twins.” In other words when twins result from the fertilization of a single egg, we can assume that God creates both souls at fertilization knowing that the embryo is destined to split (He is God after all and knows all). However, it is also possible that God creates the second soul at the point the embryo splits and becomes a separate human being.

Q: If you accidentally go to confession to a priest who doesn’t speak the same language is the confession valid? (The Priest did offer absolution I think.)

A: If a person accidentally goes to confession to a priest who doesn't speak the same language, the confession is still valid. In such a situation, the person must confess as best they can by using signs to indicate the sins they wish to confess and show their sorrow for them. The validity of the confession is not dependent on the language barrier between the penitent and the priest, but rather on the sincere confession of sins and contrition expressed by the penitent. The essential elements of a valid confession include acknowledging sins, expressing contrition, and the priest's absolution (See [CCC 1450-1460, 1480](#)). In addition, the Code of Canon law (Canon 990) informs us that an interpreter may be used in the event of a language difference between the Penitent and Confessor which implies that one is not necessary and the confession is valid in either case.

Therefore, if the penitent sincerely confesses their sins and shows contrition, the confession is considered valid, even if there is a language barrier between the penitent and the priest.

Q: Voting for particular candidate because they will support policies that will support / better help your family's dire situation even if they support a morally intrinsically evil position.

A: This is a tough test for one's conscience. The reality is that neither party or its candidates are 100% aligned with Catholic moral and social teaching. This is why the Church will never support a party or endorse a specific candidate. Instead the U.S. Conference of Bishops have produced the "Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship" (found here in English and Spanish => <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>). I would urge you to read this document as it provides clear guidance for how one should go about making their voting decisions to best align themselves with the teachings of the Catholic Church and the expectations that God has for each of us to Love God and Love our neighbors as ourselves.

I think you will find that we are called to think about the collective good and evil vs how we are impacted individually or on a family level. That can be difficult, but it is what we are called to do by God himself.

Q: If God would never give us anything impossible for us to handle in our lives, why are there so many people who feel like they can't deal with their pain anymore (physical, mental) and truly feel they have no choice but to commit suicide?

A: The answer lies in a small but important distinction. One can certainly "feel" as if they are overwhelmed and that there is nothing they can do to overcome the challenges they face, but that does not mean that "feeling" is a reality. Unfortunately, as broken humans, that can let our passions overwhelm our intellect we know that our "feelings" are not always a good barometer and, in some cases, can lead us down a very tragic path. When we are dealing with individuals contemplating or attempting suicide, we are talking about a distortion of perception that clearly renders that person's judgment suspect at best.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has very specific teachings regarding suicide that can help with this question which can be found in [CCC 2281-2283](#). Those paragraphs state:

2281: **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.

2282: If suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law. **Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.**

2283: **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.

The short of it is that anyone that seriously contemplates or attempts suicide is struggling with some sort of psychological challenge which is rendering their judgment invalid and driving them to act in direct contradiction to the natural desire to preserve one's life. Someone in that state may be incapable of properly evaluating the gravity of the challenges they face and/or taking action to address them despite their ability to do so.

One of the solutions to this type of situation is faith in God's plan and a recognition / trust that he would not allow anything that we could not handle. The presence of professional counselors and psychologists is one way that God helps us overcome even challenges of this nature where our psychological state is rendering our ability to rationally evaluate situations ineffective. Think of those professionals as graces God makes available to us to help us in this arena. That said, he will not force us to take advantage of these graces. In that case, it is not that we could not overcome the challenges in our life (in this case not the perceived insurmountable challenges but the psychological ones), but that we chose not to take advantage of grace God was making available to us to do so.

There is a reason why studies show that those that have religious faith are less likely to commit suicide. That faith can give them the hope they need and/or allow them to recognize that their evaluation of the situation and their options is corrupt, and they must seek the help of others. Even though they "feel" one thing, their worldview / faith allows them to disregard those feelings and put their trust in others. Those without this type of faith can much more easily conclude that their evaluation of the situation is accurate and that their determination that ending their life is indeed the best plan.

The bottom line is that when we are dealing with the types of psychological imbalances that would lead to someone seriously contemplating or attempting suicide, we are talking about someone who is also incapable of rationally evaluating their situation and options. In those cases, God could be giving them all the actual graces they need (e.g., in the form of access to professional help or caring friends) but they are simply refusing to accept those graces. It's not a matter of a challenge that could not be overcome, but a choice to not try to overcome it.

Q: What are Church's views on colonization and conquest? Does the Church unambiguously denounce colonization and conquest as such? Is it on a case-by-case basis?

A: The Catholic Church repudiates the "doctrine of discovery" and upholds the respect due to every human being, including indigenous peoples, rejecting concepts that fail to recognize their inherent human rights. You can find this clearly delineated in ["Joint Statement of the Dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development on the 'Doctrine of Discovery', 30.03.2023."](#) In the joint statement (just a few pages long – an easy read) the Church acknowledges historical injustices associated with colonization, emphasizing the need to remember the past and learn from it, rather than turning a blind eye to past atrocities. In addition, Pope Francis has urged the Christian community to reject the idea of cultural superiority and coercion, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and dialogue with indigenous peoples. The Church calls for special care for indigenous communities, recognizing their land as a gift from God and a sacred space essential for maintaining their identity and values. Efforts towards reconciliation, healing, and promoting understanding between different peoples are encouraged, with a focus on eliminating discrimination and marginalization of indigenous groups. Ultimately, the Catholic Church's stance on colonization involves acknowledging past wrongs, promoting reconciliation, and advocating for the dignity and rights of all individuals, including indigenous peoples.

This teaching relative to the Doctrine of Discovery stems from the fundamental principle of respect for human life outlined in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 2258-2330](#) and clearly delineated as, "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being." (CCC 2258) Section III on "Safeguarding Peace" with itself contains a section on both "Peace" ([CCC 2302-2306](#)) and "Avoiding War" ([CCC 2307-2317](#)) are particularly instructive with regards to colonization as it almost always requires a breaking of the peace and entry into some form of aggression. I find two paragraphs in those sections particularly valuable:

CCC 2304: Respect for and development of human life require peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. **Peace cannot be attained on earth without** safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, **respect for the dignity of persons and peoples**, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is "the tranquillity of order." Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.

CCC 2309: 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: a) the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain; b) all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; c) there must be serious prospects of success; and d) 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. **(NOTE: This teaching assumes a starting point that being the initial aggressor in war is always wrong – see CCC 2308)**

I think after reviewing the joint declaration and the Catechism elements referenced you will see that this is an area where the Church is very clear and definitive regarding its teaching.

Q: If the claims that Jesus was God rest in his miracles because the devil can't perform miracles as it says in John, then how can we know the antichrist and or false prophets are not of God when they will perform deceiving miracles like heal sick etc.?

A: I want to start by clarifying one point. While the signs/miracles that Jesus performed during his ministry supported his divine claims ([The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) confirms this in [CCC 548](#)) they are not the sole source for belief in Jesus' divinity. Jesus' own words and the words of his Apostles make and support that claim as well.

Satan has the power to perform "miracles" in a certain sense. While his power is limited, he can and does perform what appear to us as "miracles" in order to deceive by leveraging his superior (to us) intellect and spiritual nature. [John 8:44](#) says that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Satan can make himself appear as an angel of light ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#)). He does this to draw people away from God. When Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh, they performed a miraculous sign to confirm their message from God ([Exodus 7:8-12](#)). The magi of Egypt were able to perform the same miracle "by their secret arts" (verse 11). God's miracle was shown to be greater (verse 12), but the fact is that the magi were able to perform a satanic miracle in the king's court.

During the tribulation, the Antichrist "...by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with **pretended** signs and wonders" ([2 Thessalonians 2](#)). These "miracles" are explicitly said to be empowered by Satan but will be simple tricks supported by Satan's intellectual powers. Jesus warned that the end times will be characterized by the treachery of counterfeit prophets who "will arise and show great signs and wonders" ([Matthew 24:24](#)) and that we must be on our guard.

The existence of demonic "miracles" is one reason why we must test all spirits: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world." ([1 John 4:1](#)). Any time we are in doubt, we are to make sure that what is being taught lines up with what Scripture says. If the miracle worker is teaching something contrary to God's Word, then his miracles, no matter how convincing they seem, are a demonic delusion. The bottom line is that we must take John's counsel to heart and make sure we test every spirit so we can differentiate who is and who is not from God.

Q: I was away from the Church from age 10 - 30. Lived a total life of sin including dabbling in the occult and considering myself a witch and a pagan. At best I was agnostic. Did all sorts of sinning, none of which I believed WERE sins. Including marrying civilly and I thought that was all I needed to do. I came back when pregnant with my 1st son. Even after that I still was using artificial contraceptives and we didn't have our marriage blessed for 10 years. It's been a gradual process of trying to get right with God as much as I can. Our younger son and his wife have had one daughter and they now have 6 babies with God from consecutive miscarriages. No reason has been given to them. I just wonder

could it be that they are suffering because of my sinful life prior to our son's being born? Is there anything I can do if that's the case? Thank you for any help you can offer.

A: I want to start by welcoming you home to the Catholic Church. We are all on a faith journey drawing gradually closer to God and growing in our ability to love our neighbors like God loves us. As St. Luke shares with us in his Gospel when relating Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, "But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." ([Luke 15:20](#)). God's mercy is such that even while we may be at a great distance, he comes running to us. He does not require that we are perfect to offer us his love, he offers that love and through it we become perfect as we learn to surrender to it. It sounds like you have progressed far on that journey and are no longer at a distance in any way shape or form.

I also want to offer you my condolences for your grandchildren that have passed because of miscarriage. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us, "With respect to children who have died without Baptism, the liturgy of the Church invites us to trust in God's mercy and to pray for their salvation." ([CCC 1283](#)) Earlier in the same section we read, "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](#))

Now onto your question....

The Catechism is very clear that, "Sin is a personal act." ([CCC 1868](#)) The satisfaction / punishment due for the sins of a parent are the parent's alone to address either here on this earth or through the purgation process if we die with a balance of temporal punishment due. The Church is very clear that satisfaction is a personal experience. Children are not punished for the sins of their parents.

Sin is always a personal act, stemming from individual freedom and not from a group or community. That said, sin is viewed as having both personal and social dimensions, with every sin being personal in nature but also having social repercussions. However, the Church warns against attributing social guilt and responsibility, emphasizing that at the core of every sin is the individual who commits it. Certainly, a sin can impact one's family (directly or indirectly depending on the nature of the sin) even if only to the extent that the sinner is "less than" they could be as a result having unrepented or unabsolved sin on their soul.

The bottom line is that your daughter-in-law's miscarriages has nothing to do with your life choices and are not some form of punishment for your sins. They are a tragic mystery where we must put our trust in God and recognize that he only permits evil if he can create a greater good out of it. It may be difficult to impossible for us to recognize that greater good in this life (it may only come in the next). However, you may want to consider that by bringing those six children to heaven God is giving them the fullness of life we all desire while creating loving intercessors for your son and daughter-in-law. The family reunion will be glorious once all are present!

You can continue to pray for your son and daughter-in-law as well as ALL of seven of your grandchildren. You can also continue to shower those family members that continue in their faith journey on earth with all the love you can possibly give them.

Q: In Matthew 5:22-24 when he mentions 'brothers' in what I think is a generic term for not bio brother, I am curious if the word 'brother' is the same word when they ask Jesus about his brothers and sisters which Protestants insist is bio family. My point would be then it would be clear the word brother isn't a biological family connection but a generic link.

A: Many Protestants who want to dispute Mary's perpetual virginity will appeal to [Matthew 13:55-56](#) as evidence that Jesus had biological siblings. That verses states, "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?" However, these same people conveniently overlook [Matthew 27:55-56](#) which points out that James and Joseph are the sons of another Mary when it states, "There were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him; among whom were Mary Mag'dalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zeb'edee."

These same people conveniently overlook [Luke 2:41-51](#) (The Finding in the Temple) which talking about the Holy Family travelling to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. There is no mention of other children, and no one would think that Mary and Joseph would have abandoned other children while they took Jesus on a 1-2 week trip to Jerusalem.

Finally, at the foot of the cross, Jesus entrusts his mother to the Apostle John (see [John 19:26-27](#)). As a devout Jew, Jesus would have never entrusted his mother to the care of a non-family members if there were other male relatives who by Jewish law would be required to care for her.

This is why very few Protestant scholars would make the claim today that the "brothers" of Jesus were his biological brothers. We could dig into the language but there is really no need to. It was indeed common for the term brother and sister to be used for other male / female relatives (e.g., cousins) or simply close family friends as Aramaic – the language they would have used for common speech - did not have the variety of terms of relatives that we enjoy in English.

Even if there were true brothers of Jesus, one of the early Church traditions is that these would have been older brothers in law – sons of Joseph from a prior marriage. It is commonly proposed that Joseph was an older man who agreed to marry and assume financial responsibility for Mary – a consecrated Virgin (a practice not that uncommon in the first century). This is certainly possible and could explain why they were no longer around at the crucifixion – they were older and could have passed by then.

Through 03/04/24

Q: How is it exactly that Pope Francis is acting as the "visible source and foundation of Church unity?" It would be one thing if all the discord we currently see in the Church was the result of half-convinced Catholics' defiance of Church teaching on sexual morality. But here, the very real chaos and consternation among the bishops, clergy and laity seems to stem from pained reactions by faithful Catholics to the Pope's or his closer advisors' sometimes doctrinally suspect, or at a minimum, very confusing pronouncements, and on issues that aren't even critical, e.g. blessing of same sex couples. Why stir up all this disunity? Shouldn't he seek to unite us in truth?

A: You are correct that, "The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful." ([CCC 882](#)) That does not mean that the Pope is responsible for ensuring that everyone agrees with every proclamation or pastoral decision that the Pope makes and Catholics are free to disagree with a great deal of the statements issued by the Pope. In his role as Pope, Francis is protected from error when making official pronouncements in the areas of faith and morals that all of the faithful are bound to offer firm and definitive assent to. However, for declarations involving mutable doctrine (teachings that can substantially change) Catholics are only required to offer religious submission of will and intellect while non-doctrinal statements are to be received with respect and gratitude but do not require assent at all.

Every Pope, including those that have been sainted, have issued statements and proclamations regarding mutable doctrine, pastoral care, religious practices, etc...that the faithful have disagreed with. There will always be members of the Church – Clergy and laity – that disagree with the Pope and/or find his proclamations imprudent (e.g., agree with the substance but not the timing or means of delivery). We should never assume that we can read into the Pope's soul and discern his intent with any statement. To assume he is deliberately seeking to stir up disunity is to assume the role of God and judge what is in his heart and soul. That should be avoided at all costs, and we should always assume the best possible intentions.

In the case of [Fiducia Supplicans](#), the Document you are referencing what many have incorrectly interpreted as authorizing blessings of the relationships of same sex couples, there are Catholics on both sides of the ideological divide that are unhappy with the document issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and authorized by Pope Francis. One group feels it has gone too far and the other feels it has not gone far enough. Most Catholics and many of the "authorities" offering comments on the document are doing so without actually having read it. The reality is it is very clear that the relationship of a same sex couple can never be blessed and that there is no such thing as same sex marriage. That said, just as a Church full of sinners is given a blessing at the end of every Mass, a Priest may offer a couple engaged in a same sex relationship (or an irregular marital situation) a blessing that they may have the strength to accept God's grace and live the life of chastity all of us are called to. (see [CCC 2337-2350](#))

Pope Francis has never once issued a declaration that is contrary to a doctrine of the faith. Many Catholics, who are unfortunately, unclear what our Church actually teaches or rely on the

opinions of self-proclaimed authorities in this arena on social media or the news believe that he has. They would be wrong, and I challenge any of them to find an official statement made by the Pope that defies magisterial teaching. It would be valid to state that Francis can be ambiguous and confusing in some of his “off the cuff” statements (it is simply not a strength of his and or something he does not care a great deal about – I wish he would), but his written documents (that he always references critics to) are quite clear and orthodox. It is also fair to say that some of the official decrees (of any type) that have come out of the Vatican under Francis’ leadership may not have been prudent to issue in today’s polarized climate (NOTE: Cardinal Saint John Henry Newman famously said the same thing about Vatican I’s declaration of papal infallibility). However, to claim that Francis has violated the “Truth” of the Catholic faith would be a claim that no reasonable Theological Commentator who has studied the documents issued under his leadership would make.

Holding the Church together when so many Catholics are poorly formed in the faith yet hold highly polarized positions on seemingly every issue is not an easy job. The Pope is facing schism in the German Church on one side of the ideological divide and near constant attack from the other side across the world urging him to take more aggressive action to kick those they disagree with out of the Church. We are free to disagree with the Pope’s pastoral approach and if he makes a doctrinal error, he should be called out on it, but we should always respect the office of the Chair of Peter established by Christ himself. As part of that respect, we should always assume the best of the individual that holds that office and not seek to offer judgment on his intentions which on he and God know.

Q: Could you please give your input on Charity for the mission of God vs simple philanthropy...

A: I want to make sure that we are clear what “charity” means in the Christian sense. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines “charity” as, “The theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. “ ([CCC 1822](#)) When we say we are performing acts of Charity in the Christian sense we mean conscious acts of love. This includes what is traditionally considered charity in the secular sense – supporting the poor, downtrodden or marginalized financially or materially.

At the same time, philanthropy is defined as: “1) goodwill to fellow members of the human race, especially active effort to promote human welfare and 2) an act or gift done or made for humanitarian purposes.” ([Websters Dictionary](#)) When we engage in philanthropic work or support philanthropic organizations with our time, talent and treasure we are attempting to demonstrate love of our neighbor. That said, not all organizations that are classified as “philanthropic” are promoting “goodwill to fellow members of the human race” from the Christian perspective so we must be careful.

An organization that supports or provides services that Catholics would find in direct opposition to God’s mission (e.g., abortion, gender transitioning, contraception, same sex marriage, etc...) is not truly philanthropic from a Catholic perspective. Therefore, while supporting philanthropic groups would normally be an exercise if forwarding the mission of God, one must be careful what groups one supports. There is often a stark difference between what the secular world

considers “goodwill to fellow members of the human race” and what the church teaches is truly good for the human person.

Q: What happens to the souls of individuals with social-emotional / cognitive delays who may commit sinful acts, however do not have the capabilities to fully understand their actions? Such as individuals with intellectual disabilities/autism/down syndrome – they don’t have all have capabilities to understand right / wrong but can cause harm in the world.

A: While our freedom, “...makes man responsible for his acts to the extent that they are voluntary...**imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified** by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and **other psychological or social factors.**” ([CCC 1734-1735](#)) In other words, while a sinful act is always sinful, the limitations and circumstances of the individual committing the act can impact their responsibility for the act.

This is why the Church does not require children to avail themselves of the sacrament of confession until they have reached the “age of reason.” (see [CCC 1244](#), [1318](#), [1319](#)) Those whose mental capabilities render them no different than children prior to the age of reason, while capable of committing a sinful act, are not fully culpable for committing it. At the same time, those suffering from a psychological compulsion (e.g., addiction, mental disorder) driving them to commit sinful acts would also have reduced culpability. The degree of the reduced culpability would be based upon the individual and their mental state at the time the act was committed.

The bottom line is that choosing to sin must be a free choice made with full understanding of the sinful nature of the act and a commitment to continue with the act despite that knowledge / intention.

Q: A regular Holy Family parishioner was being probably prayed over by a non-Catholic pastor as a sign of political support. This is a pastor that asks Catholics to renounce their Catholic faith and heritage as that of Paganism, unholy, a Roman Cult. How do I reconcile this to my children who were raised Catholic, but led by this public person in their school?

A: The first thing you want to make sure your children understand is that the actions of other Catholics (laity or clergy) have no bearing on our faith. Our faith is in Jesus Christ and the Church he founded 2,000 years ago. It is a faith based upon the truth of divine revelation which informs us that Jesus is God incarnate. Jesus’s establishment of a Church (see Matthew 16) to protect, proclaim and defend his teaching combined with his promises that: a) the Church would not fail (See Matthew 16), and b) the Church would be guided by the Holy Spirit (see John 16) to prevent it from making an error in the area of faith and morals; ensure us that as long as we are practicing the faith prescribed by the Church we are in fine shape. The errors of individual Catholics do not mean Catholicism is wrong, but that the individual Catholics are wrong.

I would also let my children know that if we witness a fellow Catholic engaging in spiritually dangerous or immoral activities, we should offer them some fraternal correction if we are a person from whom that correction could be well received. If that condition is not present, fraternal correction can have a negative impact and should be refrained from. If you are a

trusted friend or family member of the parishioner that you believe was seeking a blessing from a non-Catholic “minister”, I would point out that such blessings have no effective power beyond what any Christian lay person could offer – that minister is not an ordained priest who has received the Sacrament of Holy Orders established by Christ himself. I would also point out that his anti-Catholic beliefs make approaching and associating with him a potential cause of scandal as others could see that as support for his beliefs.

Finally, I would point out that this “minister” is clearly unfamiliar with both history and the reality that the Church Christ established was indeed the Catholic Church. Protestantism did not exist until the 16th century. For 75% of Christian history (1500 years) there was only one Church – the Church that Christ founded on Peter 2,000 years ago and promised to be with always and protect – the Catholic Church. Every Protestant denomination was founded by a human being who rejected one or more of the constant teachings of Christ’s Church despite providing no signs that they had any authority from God to speak on his behalf. In other words, they rejected Christ’s authority to establish his Church and/or believed he was incapable of fulfilling his promise to safeguard it and replaced his divine authority with their human authority.

I would let your children know that there is a reason that there are literally thousands of Protestant denominations (all with different beliefs) that tend to rise and fall based upon the magnetism of their founder and his deception of those that place their trust in him instead of Christ – they always end up disappointing those they attempt to pull from Christ’s Church. Their errors restrict the graces God wants each of us to have, and eventually, once people see past the theatrics and bluster, they see the “minister” for what he is – perhaps a well-meaning, but clearly poorly-formed Christian himself.

I would also let your children know that this problem of false prophets/ministers is not a new problem. St. Paul warned Timothy about these types of men in the first century when he wrote, “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) Every single challenge/claim that a Protestant Minister of any type has proposed regarding the Catholic Church has been effectively refuted time and time again and they have been exposed as the false teachers St. Paul warned of. This is why St. John Henry Newman (a convert from Protestantism himself) stated, “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.” Anyone, who studies Church history and the practice of the early Church Fathers comes to the same conclusion – the Catholic Church is the Church that Christ founded and the single source of the fullness of Christian truth. What Protestantism has proposed defiles that truth and places its adherents in an objectively handicapped position in terms of salvation (primarily as they do not have access to the ordinary means of accessing God’s grace – the Liturgy and the Sacraments).

Finally, if your children find this “minister” engaging and convincing, feel free to ask them to ask him if he would be willing to debate one or more of his claims about the Catholic Church with a faithful Catholic that is interested in saving his soul and the souls of all those that he is

misleading. I would be more than happy to engage with him on any topic at a time and location of his choice. I would really love it if he hosted this at his place of worship in front of his loyal congregation as I am sure it would be very easy to refute his arguments with facts and historical evidence and expose his errors for all to see.

Q: Is it wrong that we refer to Priests as 'father'? In today's Gospel (Mt 23:1-12) Jesus says "Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Christ." Adding to that question, if this scripture is to be taken literally, which I understand not all scripture is, should we refer to our parent as something other than 'father' as well?

A: This is a question that is frequently asked and has been answered quite a few times by apologists over the course of time. Rather than repeat what others have already said I will simply link you to one of the main sound answers. Here is a good one from Catholic Answers => <https://www.catholic.com/tract/call-no-man-father>

Q: I have a perpetual adoration chapel nearby which is great. I was told that if I need to leave and there is no one else there I can shut the tabernacle door with the key and leave. I feel uncomfortable doing that. Is this normal or allowed?

A: Based upon how you framed the question this particular adoration chapel exposes the Blessed Sacraments simply by opening the tabernacle door housing it and it is not removed from the tabernacle, placed in a monstrance and displayed on an altar of some form. As you describe it you would not be handling the Blessed Sacrament, you would simply be ensuring it is secure being the last person in the room and not wishing Jesus to be alone and exposed to potential sacrilegious acts. There would be no problem with this at all.

As a matter of fact, as Canon Law informs us, while “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.” (Canon 943) In other words, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is to be performed by a priest or deacon. When this isn’t possible, a layperson may expose and repose the Blessed Sacrament, but there should not be any blessing. If a layperson can physically handle the Blessed Sacrament in both exposition and reposition in those circumstances when a Priest or Deacon is unavailable, the simple act of closing and locking the tabernacle door is 100% acceptable and the prudent thing to do.

Q: Can you please advise if it is OK to have the Stations of the Cross while the Blessed Sacrament is exhibited?

A: There is nothing in the Church teaching, Canon Law, or Liturgical instructions that indicates this would be a problem. As a matter of fact, it is a fairly common practice during the Lenten season. When it comes to praying the Stations of the Cross during adoration, it is important to note that the Stations of the Cross are a devotion instituted by the Church to help the faithful make a spiritual pilgrimage to the chief scenes of Christ's sufferings and death, following in the Savior's steps from the Praetorium to Golgotha and the tomb, tracing the way of Jesus who redeemed the world by his holy Cross. Engaging in this devotion during adoration is a great way

to meditate on Christ's passion and death, honoring His sacrifice and following in His footsteps while in his substantial presence.

When we are in adoration, we are focused on deepening our connection to Christ. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to adore our living God. Some will simply sit in his presence, some will pray or practice a devotion, some will read scripture to hear his voice, etc... The Stations are just another way to come closer to him by immersing yourself in the suffering he endured for us. To pray them as a community while in Christ presence is a great way to demonstrate that we are all one Body of Christ.

Q: I have had trouble sleeping and there is a video that helps me fall asleep. I'm concerned it might be a form of hypnosis. I've listened to the whole video while awake. There is a part where he says something like "I am going to countdown from five to zero...As I count down, you will feel more and more relaxed. Five...feeling more relaxed..four...allowing the sound of the waves to calm your mind." And there are relaxing chimes and tones and ocean wave sounds. Is this hypnosis and do I need to avoid it?

A: Whether or not this video is having some sort of hypnotic effect or is simply employing a relaxation technique (e.g., isolated parts of your body and focusing on relaxing them starting from toes and moving up is a very common relaxation technique) would only be a significant concern under a couple of conditions. If you were using this technique as a means of having a religious experience that was contrary to the Catholic faith, or through the hypnotic effect you are opening yourself to being manipulated in some way those would be red flags. However, in today's hectic world, many of us take advantage of different tools to help us calm down and prepare for sleep. There is nothing wrong with using those tools unless they come with the problems mentioned above.

The Church does not have an official teaching on the morality of hypnosis if this is indeed a form of it. The [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) offers some interesting historical and theological thought on the subject and even goes as far as saying, "Hypnotism, therefore, is a dangerous, if not a morally detestable, practice. In the process of suggestion, the individual alienates his liberty and his reason, handing himself over to the domination of another. Now, no one has any right thus to abdicate the rights of his conscience to renounce the duty towards his personality." (Read Full Entry [HERE](#)) That said, the Catholic Encyclopedia is not a source of Magisterial teaching so Catholics are not required to submit to any guidance found within it. At the same time, the Catholic Encyclopedia article also highlights some of the practical benefits of hypnosis.

The key, as I state above and as this excerpt from the article points out, is being wary of hypnosis or those things that have a hypnotic effect if they place you in a position where you are ceding control of your senses to others. Your brief description does not indicate that this is the case, and you are merely using this video to help you get to sleep. You should have nothing to worry about under those circumstances.

Through 02/26/24

Q: I overheard a classmate tell another classmate why does judgement day have to happen? And I thought how would I respond to that?

A: As Catholics we would respond that we are not apprehensive about the day of judgement. Rather we look forward to it, pray for it (every time we pray the Our Father), and work to bring it on (by sharing and defending the faith). As Catholics we do not look at this life as our end. It is merely an “apprenticeship” that we must work and suffer through to master our ability to love God and love neighbor as God loves us (unconditional love that wills the good of the other over good of self). That is the purpose of this finite life. If we can become masters of love (the purpose of any apprenticeship is the master the skills being learned) we will be prepared for eternal life in God’s presence and the community of others that have become masters of love.

For those that choose to pursue the opposite of love in this life – selfishness (hate is NOT the opposite of love, selfishness is) - and continue in that choice until their death in this world moving onto eternal life in the presence of God and a loving community would be intolerable. They would have become masters of self-interest and disregard for the good of others if it impinged on their individual “freedoms.” Living in a Trinitarian community of love would simply be torture for someone who has chosen themselves over all others. Even if that individual knows that the only thing that would give them ultimate satisfaction is that community of love, their will would be fixed on themselves and could not bear to choose otherwise. Our God is merciful however and rather than simply annihilate one of his sons and daughters that choose against him, he provides them an eternal existence outside of his presence (that they freely rejected and could not stand). We call this existence Hell.

Back to the original question, “Why does judgement day have to happen?” The answer is simple, we are not built for this world that is in a natural state of journeying where humanity is broken. Both of those things are the root cause of the evil and suffering we all experience. The natural world in a state of journeying is the cause of natural evil (e.g., earthquakes) and our own brokenness is the cause of moral evil (e.g., murder). The result is we will all suffer (to different degrees) and die. At the end of our lives (end of natural life or a life cut short by natural or moral evil) we will immediately experience what we call the particular judgement ([CCC 1021-1022](#)) and our choices in this life will become manifest for eternity. We will either “graduate” as masters of love or masters of selfishness and be off to heaven (perhaps with a period of purification first in purgatory) or hell respectively. In both cases, our destination is the only place we could stand to be for all eternity. At the end of time all humanity will collectively experience the final judgement ([CCC 1038-1041](#)) where it become clear to all what each of us chose in this life, how those choices manifested through time, and why each person’s final destination was just giving us all that ultimate satisfaction of knowing “Why?”

We were made for beatitude and life eternal. There is a reason, that we look to the fall of man as a “Happy Fault.” Without that fall we would never have the opportunity to grow and mature and become the adult sons and daughters of God we were meant to be. Instead, we would have

lived forever in a childlike state of bliss but not the ultimate happiness for which we were created. While that “bliss” may sound attractive at first, imagine remaining in perpetual childhood. That is not what any of us wants to be – we seek maturity and completeness, the opportunity to become the best version of ourselves. That comes at a cost as everything of value does. Our childlike immortality on earth was traded for an opportunity to grow into masters of love and live in eternity in that love. Our first parent’s fall gave us access to quite an upgrade. Realizing that upgrade requires that we die, face our particular judgement, and then move on to our eternal life in the state we ultimately chose here on earth. The final judgement will give all humanity the opportunity to see how God’s providential plan was executed and how justice was ultimately rendered to each individual human being throughout time.

Q: Is there a right or wrong way to read the Bible? If you only flip through the pages is it a sin?

A: There is no right or wrong way to read, study or pray with the Word of God as found in Sacred Scripture. God gave us his Word in written form so that we could come into a deeper relationship with him. By reading / meditating on his Word we are directly accessing God’s side of the conversation that he wants to have with us.

Flipping through pages and reading random texts is not a sin UNLESS you believe that by randomly playing “bible roulette” you will be getting messages from God. This would be a potentially superstitious belief. God does speak to us through His Word, but using the bible this way to perhaps make decisions or gain insight is not appropriate and is sinful as it is a belief in fate or luck.

You should want to read the Bible in its entirety and to re-read it often so that you can receive the messages God is offering to us. I recommend people start with the Gospels and then read the balance of the New Testament. After that is complete, returning to read the Old Testament brings tremendous value.

Q: Why would God create people He knew would end up in hell at the end of their lives? If He is merciful, wouldn’t it have been more merciful to just not create them in the first place if He knew they would be destined (by their own choices yes) to eternity of suffering.

A: Since God exists outside of time, he knows all things that are possible as he sees everything that has or will happen all at once. It does not mean God causes all things anymore than one who is standing on the top of a tall building and sees that a car accident is about to happen on the streets below is the cause of the accident. It is our free will choice to ignore the natural law implanted on our hearts, or, if we are aware of Christ and his Church, to ignore the commands of God which have been given for our good, that result in our condemnation (see [The Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC 1033](#)). As a result, those that are condemned to eternal separation from God (that is what Hell is - see [CCC 1035](#)) have freely chosen that fate.

With all that said, let’s get to your question. While God knows all things that are capable of being known; until a soul is created there is no way for God to know what choices that soul will make. Our souls are created at the moment of our conception (see [CCC 366](#)). Up until the point that we begin to exist at our conception, God does not know what choices we will make as we

do not yet exist to make those choices. Therefore, we must be created in order for him to know whether our choices will lead to heaven or hell.

God will give us all the grace we need to choose eternal life with him over eternal separation from him in Hell (See [CCC 1996-2005](#)) because he wants all to be saved (see [1 Timothy 2:4](#); [John 3:16-17](#)). He will continue to give us actual grace until we take our last breath in the hope that we will choose to accept and act on that that grace and modify our path. Those that reject that grace their entire life on earth actively reject God and, upon their deaths, when their decision is fixed, they could not stand to be in God's presence. Rather than annihilating sons and daughters whom he still loves, God allows them to continue to exist in separation from him (again – this is what hell is). Many theologians would argue that the pain of hell for one that freely chooses to go there would be less than the pain they would experience in heaven being in the presence of the God they so heartedly rejected.

Hopefully, you can see that God is being merciful. Existing is certainly better than not existing. God brings us into existence and sustains us through his sheer act of will. Even if we reject him, he continues to love us and maintain us in existence. Hell is the only place those that reject God can continue to exist. God allowing existence in that state is indeed a merciful act.

Q: I have a friend that believes that baptism is necessary for salvation, but they don't believe in infant baptism. Their reasoning is that infants don't have sin so they don't need to be baptized. He doesn't believe in original sin because "sin is what we do it can't be inherited." How do I explain to him original sin and how it's biblical? I tried showing him Romans 5 and Psalms 51 but he says that "Romans 5:12-19 is talking about spiritual death and not the key points of original sin, and Psalms 51:5 is speaking figuratively and doesn't refer to David being born sinful." One other objection he had was that Jesus should have had original sin. His reasoning is that Jesus was born like us so he should've had original sin, but he couldn't have had original sin because he was sinless, so either the bible is wrong about Jesus being born like us or original sin isn't true.

A: I think you want to start by correcting his understanding of what we mean by original sin. What we believe is that our first parents were endowed with Sanctifying Grace as a preternatural (above our nature) gift that would have allowed them to overcome their human nature avoiding sin and death. When our first parents rejected God, they were rejecting that gift, and hence, it was lost. As a result, that gift could not be passed on to their descendants which were all born without sanctifying grace in their souls. Without the gift of original holiness that was given to our first parents by God to overcome our sinful nature (concupiscence) we need to be given the gift of sanctifying grace again to bring us into relationship with God (see [the Catechism of the Catholic Church – CCC 396-412](#)).

To help your friend understand this "loss" of original holiness have him imagine a wealthy family where the Father gambles away the family fortune. The Father sinned, but the family and all its descendants share in paying the price for that "sin" as the wealth could not be given to his descendants. That is how original "sin" is passed on". What is being "passed on" is not the actual sin itself, but the resultant loss that sin caused. "We don't "inherit" the action that was the sin, we "inherit" the results of that sin – the loss of sanctifying grace. Hence, in order for anyone (including infants) to obtain sanctifying grace and be brought into God's family they must be baptized to be infused with sanctifying grace and be brought into the Body of Christ.

As for Jesus being born like us this is certainly not the case. He was singularly conceived by the Holy Spirit ([Luke 1:35](#)) to a woman that herself was immaculately conceived (conceived full of grace – [Luke 1:28](#)). As a matter of fact, we are directly told that he (Jesus) is like us in every way except for sin ([Hebrews 4:15](#)) – both the deprivation of sanctifying grace (original sin) and personal sin. To think that God, the source of sanctifying grace, would be devoid of sanctifying grace, is simply incoherent.

As for the need for infant baptism you should start by reminding your friend that Baptism is freely given gift of God. We do nothing and can do nothing to earn the grace of God. Our faith does not earn sanctifying grace. Our good works cannot earn sanctifying grace. It is a gratuitous gift. As [CCC 1250](#) informs us, “Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called. **The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation** is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and **the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth.**” The tradition of infant Baptism goes back to the earliest days of the Church for this very reason (See [Acts 16:15](#), [16:31](#), [16:33](#), [1 Corinthians 1:16](#)) as entire households (which would have included children and infants) were Baptized from the very beginning. As the Catechism informs us, to deny a child baptism would be to withhold the grace that is required for entry into heaven (See [John 3:5](#), [Mark 16:16](#), [1 Peter 3:21](#), etc...) and that would be an incredible cruelty.

Q: When refuting "once saved always saved," why is Ezekiel 18:21-24 not all that is required?

A: The simple answer is we should avoid basing our theology / apologetic arguments on a single verse or passage of Sacred Scripture. Doing so is known as “proof texting” and is a notorious way of getting into trouble in theological or apologetic debates. This is why the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that there are, “three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it: 1) Be especially attentive to the content and unity of the whole Scripture..., 2) Read the Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church..., and 3) Be attentive to the analogy of faith. By ‘analogy of faith’ we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.” ([CCC 111-114](#)). This means we need to base our doctrinal arguments upon the entirety of Scripture (not just a single verse or series of verses) interpreted in light of universal Church teaching while remaining aware that scripture cannot contradict itself (if we believe there is a conflict in scripture the error is in our interpretation).

While [Ezekiel 18:21-24](#) can be used as part of an argument to demonstrate that the doctrine of eternal security is false (along with [Matthew 7:21](#); [Matthew 24:13](#), [Romans 11:22](#), [Philippians 2:12](#); [1 Corinthians 10:11-12](#), [2 Timothy 2:11-13](#), etc...), you want to avoid basing your argument on a single verse / passage as every passage can be pulled apart and twisted to mean other things. You want to use a variety of sources to demonstrate that the “most likely” holistic interpretation of all Sacred Scripture is “X”. If you rely on any verse alone (e.g., Ezekiel 18:21-24) a believer in eternal security could offer an alternative interpretation – in this case he/she could simply state that the individual that “seemed” righteous was clearly not one of the elect (He was never truly called and / or never truly believed), and that when “he turned away” his true nature was revealed. Furthermore, a supporter of eternal security could easily throw out their own series of verses that could be twisted to support their position (e.g., [John 10:27-29](#), [John 6:37](#),

[John 5:24](#), [Romans 11:29](#), [John 3:16](#), etc...) when taken out of the context and unity of the entire Bible.

The bottom line is that when we seek to defend our theological positions based upon any single passage or verse of Sacred Scripture, we are building our argument on a weak foundation. For every verse one has that seems to support their position, one's opponent can offer a verse that seems to contradict it. Therefore, one needs to be aware of the consistent message that can be found in the entirety of scripture as interpreted through Sacred Tradition (as passed on by the Apostles before the New Testament was even written) that is safeguarded by the Church. This is especially the case when you can point to just as many verses that seem to support one position as you can find to support the opposite (a seeming conflict with the analogy of faith).

Q: I was watching a debate and I heard the question, "How is it that Saints extra merits go into the treasury of merit if there is no way to merit heaven? It seems that having extra merit would mean they did merit heaven and some." I personally do not know how to answer this. Thank you so much for all that you do.

A: [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) has an excellent section on the teachings regarding merit in [CCC 2006-2011](#). In that section you will discover that the Church teaches the basic premise that, "With regard to God, **there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man**. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from him, our Creator." You will also find that the Church teaches, "**The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace.**" Finally, we read that while, "...**no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification**, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, **we can then merit for ourselves and for others** the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life."

The bottom line is that we can do nothing to merit on our own, but by responding to the grace of God we can merit "for ourselves and **others**." As St. Paul tells us, "For **by grace you have been saved through faith**; and this is not your own doing, **it is the gift of God**, not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**" (Ephesians 2:8-10) By responding to God's grace and completing the works that he has planned for each of us we are indeed able to merit enough to satisfy the demands of justice for our sins and, in some cases, contribute to the treasury of merit of Mary and the Saints that is added to the infinite merit of Christ himself.

Q: Not recognizing the Church as mother is the same as not recognizing God as Father Is that true? Because Protestantism separates Christ and His Church, and I don't like. Explain detail.

A: As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches us, "God the Father...is the first person of Most Holy Trinity." ([CCC 198](#)) A little further on we read 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... 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](#)) So God’s “Fatherhood” is a means of representing our relationship with him in terms that humans can understand and, as the Catechism informs us motherhood is equally expressive of that relationship.

While the Church is often referred to as, “Holy Mother Church” (CCC 105, 1141, 1163, 1203, 1249, 1667, 2103) in reference to Christ as her spouse (CCC 79, 507, 757, 1163, 1323, 1366, 1642) that is again a means of representing the relationship that between Christ and his Church. Just as the image of Christ and his Body (with all Catholics as members of that body) are used to represent the Church on earth. (CCC 737, 752, 771, 779, 789, 797, etc... too many to list) The representation of the Church as Christ’s body is much more frequent in the Catechism than the representation of the Church as the Bride of Christ and our mother.

These images of God as Father (and Mother), the Church as Mother, Bride and Body of Christ are just that - images. They are means of expressing and helping us understand the relationship we as “sons and daughters” of God have with him and his Church on earth. If one chooses to reject the use of one of those images while still accepting the nature of God and his Church on earth that is not a problem. The images are given to use to help understand that nature and are not meant to be dogmatic terms that must be used as if they have meaning in and of themselves relative to our salvation. The important thing for Catholics is understanding and deepening the relationship we have with our Triune God and recognizing the role of his Church as the ordinary means by which we can access his grace and encounter him during our faith journey.

As for Protestants that want to separate Christ from his Church that is relationally impossible. Christ’s Church is the representation and extension of his Kingdom here on earth. (CCC 541, 542, 567, 670, etc... too many to list) Failing to recognize that is a failure to recognize Christ’s own words in sacred scripture when he tells us, “...The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” ([Luke 17:20-21](#)) The kingdom is in Christ and, by extension the Church, that he established and left in place to spread the Good News to all.

Q: I have found a claim on YouTube that states that all of the prophecy in the Bible has already been fulfilled and there’s no hope for anybody anymore so we are all basically forsaken. Would I be correct in assuming this is a heresy and not something I should be worried about? I tried looking it up and the closest thing I could find was something called Hyper-Preterism but I couldn’t find much on why it’s wrong, only the people defending the idea.

A: Let’s start with what a heresy is. [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, “Heresy is the obstinate post-Baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and Catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same.” ([CCC 2089](#)) This means that anyone who is Baptized and knowingly denies a dogma of the faith (something revealed directly by God through Sacred Scripture or Holy Tradition) would indeed be guilty of promoting a heretical belief. If this same person, recognized that the Catholic Church is the Church founded by Christ (or should have recognized this), and hence the Church has the authority to define what is and is not Dogma; he / she would be obstinately denying truth that, “must be believed with divine and Catholic faith” and would indeed be a heretic. This is why we consider the original reformers heretics, but the subsequent protestant generations who were

taught by the original reformers are merely invincibly ignorant as they were merely believing what they were taught by those they trusted. In the absence of access to the truth through some other means than their religious leaders, these post-reformation protestants would be invincibly ignorant and not heretics.

Now we can look at it this teaching rises to the level of heresy.

1. It meets the first criteria in that it is a denial of the Dogma of the faith that Christ came to save all men which implies all men can be saved – “and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” ([1 John 2:2](#)); “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. ([1 Timothy 4:10](#)) Therefore, it is a heretical belief.
2. It meets the second criteria if the promoters of this theory are validly baptized making this a post-Baptismal denial of dogmatic truth.
3. What would determine if they are guilty of heresy and not just espousing a heretical belief would be if they recognized (or have no excuse for not recognizing) that this is a truth of the faith safeguarded by the Church Christ established to promote and defend the faith. Otherwise, they would simply be guilty of invincible ignorance and holding a heretical belief as a result (at least in part) of that ignorance.

As for whether you should be worrying about it; you hopefully have the answer by now. It is clearly a heretical belief that directly contradicts Word of God and 2,000 years of his Church’s teaching. It is also a poorly formed argument as presented. To say that “all of the prophecy in the Bible has already been fulfilled and there’s no hope for anybody anymore so we are all basically forsaken” is two connect two things that have no logical dependency. Even if all prophecy was fulfilled (we don’t believe that) that would not mean all are forsaken – the two are not logically connected in any way.

Through 02/19/24

Q: Is God capable of committing acts of evil? In the first reading on the third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Lectionary: 68 - Jonah 3:1-5, 10) it was written that "When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out." Does this mean the acts that were carried out in other stories that result in the death of humans were considered "acts of evil" committed by God?

A: The simple answer to the basic question, "Is God capable of committing acts of evil?" is "No!" God is all Good and it would be impossible for him to choose against himself and hence he can only select the good. Evil is a deprivation or absence of a good that should exist (e.g., blindness is a deprivation of life; slavery is a deprivation of freedom; unnatural death is a deprivation of life). God will permit evil (deprivation of the good) only to the extent that he can create an even greater good out of it for an individual and/or humanity as a whole.

When many read the Bible they see two different Gods described – the angry, wrathful, violent God of the Old Testament and the kind, merciful, peaceful God of the New Testament. Belief in this two God view is a heresy that has existed in a number of forms (e.g., Marcionism) over the course of the last 2,000 years. We are not seeing two different God's described in the Bible. We are seeing the human writers of the books of the Bible conveying the literal meaning of what they are writing using acceptable cultural and literary norms.

One of the things you see often from the ancient writers of the Old Testament is their use of anthropomorphism - attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a god, animal, or object. Clearly God is a spirit and unchanging, so physical and emotional characteristics assigned to him by the human writers were little more than their projection of humanity onto God. When anthropomorphism is combined with the ancient belief in attributing everything that happened to God as if he was the efficient cause of all actions, you get statements like, "When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out." Statements like this abound in the Bible and are often combined with the Jewish practice of employing extreme hyperbole (e.g., all the men, women, and children were utterly destroyed – yet these same people show up again two chapters later) and leave the reader wondering why we are interested in this God at all.

This is why when interpreting scripture exegetes study cultural, scientific, and literary norms of the civilization of the author when trying to effectively interpret the literal message that the author was trying to convey. Very often these anthropomorphic traits assigned to God by the author were little more than a metaphor. For example, "God's anger" is often employed by ancient authors to communicate that some action was morally wrong.

If we take a look at [Jonah 3:10](#) at face value, we are faced with two questions: 1) How could an unchanging God change his mind about destroying Nineveh? And 2) Wouldn't an omniscient God have known he would change his mind before it ever happened? Trent Horn answers these questions directly in his book, *Hard Sayings* (Catholic Answer Press; El Cajon, CA; 2016; pg. 178) when he writes:

“Notice that in [Jonah 1:2](#) God told Jonah, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.’ In [Jonah 3:4](#) our hero preaches the specific message God gave him: ‘Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.’ Since God was known to be merciful the people trusted that this message implicitly ended with the caveat, ‘unless you repent.’ Indeed, God always knew that the people of Nineveh would repent; it was the people of Nineveh who did not know they were capable of repentance. Therefore, when the text says, ‘God changed or repented from evil’, this is a metaphorical way of saying that human being changed, or they have repented, not that God changed in any way.”

This is why St. Peter tells us, “First of all, you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” ([2 Peter 1:20-21](#)). What St. Peter is telling us is that scriptural interpretation can be hard (check out [2 Peter 3:16](#) to see what he writes about the writings of St. Paul). This is why Jesus gave us his Church that has the power to bind and loose (interpret, teach, make laws, enforce laws, define who’s in and who’s out, etc...) and that is being guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth ([John 16:13](#)). We need the Church to ensure that our interpretation of scripture is accurate.

The Church has defined the three critical criteria that must be employed when interpreting sacred scripture found in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 112-114](#) (the entire section CCC 105-114 is worth a read):

1. Be especially attentive “to the content and unity of the whole Scripture.” Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God’s plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover.
2. Read the Scripture within “the living Tradition of the whole Church.” According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church’s heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God’s Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture (“according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church”)
3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith. By “analogy of faith” we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.

By applying these criteria and taking the time to get a better understanding of the cultural and literary norms of the inspired writers (or finding someone who does have that knowledge) these “Dark Passages” of scripture can be brought into the light. Books like Trent Horn’s mentioned above or *Dark Passage of the Bible*, by Matthew Ramage are great reads to help get a better understanding of those elements of scripture that just don’t seem to make sense.

Q: Is it true that when you give up something for Lent, on Sundays we shouldn’t fast because it’s rest day?

A: There are no specific requirements for giving up anything or doing anything during Lent other than fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and abstaining from meat for all other Fridays during Lent. Any penitential or faith building commitment that one makes during Lent (e.g., giving up something) can be a powerful spiritual muscle builder, but there are no Church guidelines for how you are to do it. The commitment you make is between you and God.

Many people do choose to suspend penitential activities on Sunday as it is a feast day (we affectionately call every Sunday little Easter). That said there is no official church guideline or practice that you have to adhere to in this area.

Q: Why did Joseph of Arimathea volunteer to bury Jesus in his family tomb? Would Jesus not have his own family tomb to be buried in, like near St. Joseph?

A: The Jewish burial practice in the first century had two main steps. A body would be temporarily stored in a tomb (often with other recently deceased people in a common tomb) so that the body could decay. A year or so later, the bones would be recovered now that they were free of human flesh. The bones would be taken apart, placed in an ossuary (a small bone box) and then buried in a cemetery. Having a private, family tomb for the first part of this process would be limited to the members of the upper class / elite. Most would use a common public tomb provided by the community that could contain many bodies. The evidence points to Jesus and Mary being of limited means, so it is unlikely they would have had a private tomb prepared for this first step of the process.

In [Matthew 27:57](#) we read, “When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.” In the parallel passages – [Mark 15:43](#), [Luke 23:50](#) and [John 19:38](#) – we discover that Joseph of Arimathea was, “a respected member of the council” who was also, “a good and righteous man,” and who, “asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus.” As a “rich man” and member of the governing council he would have been in a financial position to have a private family tomb that was ready to accept Jesus. In [Matthew 27:60](#) we are told that this was a new tomb just recently prepared. By placing Jesus in a newly hewed, private tomb, Joseph was showing Jesus a great deal of respect – the respect due one’s Lord.

Q: Are there restrictions on Catholics attending funeral services for Catholics at non-Catholic venues?

A: There are no formal restrictions on Catholics attending funeral services for Catholics at non-Catholic venues. However, the [Code of Canon Law](#) does define three provisions for the funerals of Catholics in Canon 1177:

§1. A funeral for any deceased member of the faithful **must generally be celebrated in his or her parish church.**

§2. Any member of the faithful or those competent to take care of the funeral of a deceased member of the faithful **are permitted to choose another church for the funeral rite** with the consent of the person who governs it and **after notification of the proper pastor of the deceased.**

§3. **If a death occurred outside the person’s own parish, and the body was not transferred** to it nor another church legitimately chosen for the funeral rite, the **funeral**

is to be celebrated in the church of the parish where the death occurred unless particular law has designated another church.

Therefore, Catholics are required to celebrate their funeral at the parish in which they are registered or another Catholic Church as the situation demands. That said, “The Order of Christian Funerals (Ordo exsequiarum) of the Roman liturgy gives three types of funeral celebrations, corresponding to the three places in which they are conducted (the home, the church, and the cemetery), and according to the importance attached to them by the family, local customs, the culture, and popular piety...” (see [Catechism of the Catholic Church – CCC 1678](#)). Therefore, if the proper form of the Catholic funeral rite is used by an ordained Priest or Deacon, a Catholic funeral can take place outside of a Catholic Church at a Catholic Cemetery or in a private Catholic home.

If a Catholic decides to have a funeral that violates the guidelines above, other Catholics are not banned from attending the service. However, one who is invited would want to urge the family and other loved ones of the deceased to have a Catholic funeral. One may also want to consider the possibility of their attendance creating scandal by participating in a funeral rite of a Catholic that falls outside of the recommended guidelines. In most cases this should not be a major issue, but individual judgement should be used.

Q: I know we are allowed to pray Jewish prayers and I wanted to know if these Jewish things are good things for Catholics to practice to be closer to God: 1) Can we pray the Modeh Ani, I know this prayer is said after you wake up praising God, according to Wikipedia the prayer goes as said "I give thanks before you, King living and eternal, for You have returned within me my soul with compassion; abundant is Your faithfulness." Is there anything wrong with Catholics praying this Jewish prayer? 2) Are Jewish brother and sisters --and even our Muslim brothers and sisters-- fast from sunrise to sunset abstaining from food and drinks is this also an acceptable way to fast instead of the two small meals and one regular meal but rather keeping in accordance with Catholicism and eating a small meal before sunrise and then at after sunset eating the one regular meal or vice versa?

A: As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us in its section on prayer, “Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God. (St. John Damascene, De fide orth. 3, 24:PG 94, 1089C). God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter with Himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man.” ([CCC 2590-2591](#)) Anytime, you are opening your heart to God in Adoration ([CCC 2626-2628](#)), Petition ([CCC 2629-2633](#)), Intercession ([CCC 2634-2626](#)), Thanksgiving ([CCC 2637-2638](#)), and / or Praise ([CCC 2639-2643](#)) you are indeed praying properly. The Modeh Ani touches on Adoration, Thanksgiving and Praise of the one true God so it is certainly a wonderful prayer. There is a treasure trove of Jewish prayers that we use regularly in our Catholic Liturgy – the Psalms. As a matter of fact, many of the prayers in our Liturgy come directly from Old Testament scripture or are modelled after ancient Jewish prayers. Our faith is built upon a Jewish foundation and the prayers of our forefathers in faith are certainly acceptable to God who chose them to bring his light to the world.

The fasting that is prescribed in the five precepts of the Church ([CCC 2041-2043](#)) with specific requirements delineated by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops [HERE](#) are the minimum requirement. Fasting is a means of joining in Christ's sacrifice in some small way, while

simultaneously both developing self-mastery of your intellect over your bodily passions (a skill / strength that helps us avoid sin) and performing a penance for past forgiven sins. If you can extend your fasting and / or fast more often you are welcome to do so as a means of increasing your connection to Christ's sacrifice, further strengthening your self-mastery skills, and performing penance in reparation / satisfaction for sin.

Q: 5 questions for you from my Son. 1. Does Satan have free will? 2. Do Angels have free will? 3. Does GOD predetermine or have fore knowledge and what's the difference. How can he know everything about us and not predetermine? 4. How do we answer someone who questions whether we worship angels, and saints. 5. What's the difference between honoring, praying to and worship? Keep Mary, the Saints and the Angels vs the worship of GOD?

A: Thanks for the questions. The first two are asking the same thing as Satan is an angel so I will answer them together...

Satan is one of the fallen angels and is most often identified as the leader of the fallen angels. [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) is very clear in paragraph [CCC 311](#) when it states, "**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..." Therefore, it is clear that angels have free will. This is reiterated in the Catechism's section on Angels ([CCC 328-354](#)). It is even more clearly stated in the section on the fall of the Angels ([CCC 391-395](#)) which provides some great insight into their use of free will and inability of those angels who fell to return to God when it says, "...This 'fall' consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and his reign...It is the irrevocable character of their choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy, that makes the angels' sin unforgivable. 'There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death.'" (CCC 392-393)

Question 3 is a great one. Perhaps the easiest way to address it is to use an analogy. Ask your son to imagine he is on top of a tall building in a big city and can see traffic in all directions on the streets below. From your son's vantage point, he can see that there are two cars hurtling towards each other and are likely to collide. Your son's foreknowledge of the accident does not mean he caused it in any way – your son did not predetermine the events that led up to the accident even though he could see them unfold from above. Since God exists outside of time, he sees everything that ever did happen, is happening and ever will happen all at once in what many have termed the eternal know as if he is on top of a really tall building. Just because God has foreknowledge of the events that will transpire as a result of the laws of nature and our free will choices does not mean he predestined those choices to occur. They remain our choices even though he knows every choice we will make at the moment we are created by him (he can't know what choices we will make before we are created as our choices are predicted on our existence). This little [ARTICLE](#) from Jimmy Akin provides a short and to the point description of the Catholic view of predestination that I believe will be helpful.

As for Question 4 the answer is a simple, "No." Catholics do not worship anyone other than the one true God. We do, however, offer our respect to those that have accomplished what we are trying to accomplish by living a life of discipleship and ending their life on earth in friendship with God – the saints. It is just like how we look up to certain people on earth who have done great things (e.g., Nobel prize winners; Great Athletes; Talented Artists; Those in self-sacrificial

professions like Fireman; etc...). We “look up” to the saints because of what they have accomplished, offer them our respect for that accomplishment and seek to model our lives after theirs in hopes of accomplishing similar things.

As for answering Question 5, I am going to answer that by expanding the discussion of Saints. A saint is simply a person – human or angelic that is in heaven. We have multiple places in the Old Testament where we see veneration of angels – saints. Two obvious ones are in [Joshua 5:14](#) and [Daniel 8:17](#). We venerate angels because of their great dignity which comes from their union with God.

That same union is experienced by human saints as angelic saints. We know that humans in heaven experience that dignity because of what John tells us in [1 John 3:2](#) – “we shall see him as he is.” At the same time the author of the letter to the Hebrews is clear about those in heaven being witnesses to our lives (meaning they are both conscious and aware of our struggles) when he says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great 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 our faith.” ([Hebrews 12:1-2](#)) The saints in heaven have succeeded in what we are trying to do – end our lives in communion with God – and therefore are worthy of our respect and admiration.

When we talk about veneration of saints, we must make it clear that only God is due worship. In worshipping God we are recognizing him as the source of our being and are acknowledging that we are willing to sacrifice all of ourselves to him. We venerate the Saints like we would venerate those we respect on earth who are deserving of honor and respect for their accomplishments and to whom we often look to as models for our earthly lives. However, we do not offer the saints (or those we model ourselves after on earth) all of ourselves as a sacrifice. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us, “The honor paid to sacred images (and the Saints they represent) is a ‘respectful veneration’ not the adoration due to God alone.” ([CCC 2132](#)) The Catechism also tells us that in, “... venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, until he, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory.” ([CCC 1090](#)) The saints are our models that we seek to emulate but we do not worship them as the source of our being as we do God.

When we pray what we are doing is engaging in conversation. Our prayer to God can contain adoration, thanksgiving, contrition / sorrow, and intercession. This type of “conversation” with God recognizes that he is worthy of adoration and thanksgiving as the source of our being, deserves our contrition when we break from his friendship / refuse his love, and can respond to our intercessory requests as both the creator and sustainer of all that is in existence. From the perspective of the intercessory role of saints the verse from Hebrews above demonstrates that the Saints in heaven are aware of our needs as witnesses. [Revelation 5:8](#) goes a step further and talks about the prayers of the saints being offered to God. We see this again in [Revelation 8:3](#) as the angel brings the prayers of the saints to God. On multiple occasions St. Paul asks the faithful on earth to pray for him (see [Romans 15:30](#), [Colossians 4:3](#), [1 Thessalonians 5:25](#), [2 Thessalonians 3:1](#), [Ephesians 6:18-19](#), etc...). If those on earth can pray for us / intercede for us, what is to stop those in heaven, who are clearly aware of our needs (see [Luke 15:7](#), [10](#); [Revelation 6:10](#)), from doing the same? As James tells us, “...the prayer of a righteous man has

great power in its effects.” (James 5:16). Who is more righteous than a saint in heaven? While a saint cannot, of his own power, give us what we need, a saint (who by default is in close proximity to God) can speak to God on our behalf and urge God to address our requests.

Through 02/12/24

Q: I just read the following in The Four Last Things by Fr. Wade Menezes, "Like the first sin, [sin] is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become 'like gods'" (Gen 3:5), the quote coming from a longer passage in the CCC, 1849-50. In what particular way was Adam's desire to be 'like gods' a sin? I ask because Gen 1:27 tells us that we were made in the image and likeness of God, so that would seem to be God's intent, that we be like Him. Also, John 10:34 has Jesus citing Psalm 82:6 when He says, "I said, you are gods, you are all sons of the Most High." And, CCC 460 says, "The Son of God became man so that we might become God." Finally, in the Catholic Answers entry, Can Man Become God?, it cites Jn 17:22-23, Eph 3:19, 2 Pet 1:4, and 1 Jn 3:2 to support the idea of man becoming God, or like god. The article does distinguish between participation in grace vs generation by nature. So, is that the main way that the desire to be like gods is different from what the other passages mean, that somehow Adam's act reveals his desire to be like God in nature rather than a participation in grace, and how can we know that this was Adam's intent in his act of disobedience? If that WAS Adam's intent and thus the reason it was a sin, then I also have to ask, are there Biblical passages that speak of Adam's intent to be like God in nature, or do we rely more on the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, which even there I would assume comes from their reading of the Scriptures?

A: I believe the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) answers your question (“In what particular way was Adam's desire to be 'like gods' a sin?”) directly when it states, “God created man in his image and established him in his friendship. A spiritual creature, man can live this friendship only in free submission to God. The prohibition against eating ‘of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ spells this out: ‘for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die.’ **The ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, being a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator, and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom.” ([CCC 396](#)) (NOTE: That entire section ([CCC 396-401](#)) would be a good read for you.) Therefore, it was our first parents desire to be the judges of Good and Evil (something only God has jurisdiction over) that was the sin in question.**

As for God creating us in his “image and likeness” that is usually interpreted by Theologians one of two ways (many see if meaning both). Many equate “image and likeness” with the two great gifts God has given us – intellect and will. This has been a popular understanding for centuries (see this brief [ARTICLE](#)). Others have pointed out that our being made in God’s “image and likeness” refers to our function in creation – that we represent God to the material world. Jimmy Akin discusses this and provides references in this [PODCAST](#) started at 3:26. It does not mean God intended to make us just like him, but it does mean we were meant to be a reflection (albeit a poor) one of his nature.

As for man becoming God...you reference this Catholic Answers [ARTICLE](#) and rightly point out that when discussing the heretical idea that man can somehow become God in nature and being, the article points out that, “...Scripture also teaches that man can become God-like.” Just a few sentences later when discussing Scripture verses that seem to indicate that man can become Gods it states, “However, neither these nor any other verses mean that human nature can be changed into the divine nature of God. What they mean is that human nature can

partake in the divine nature of God.” So while we can become more and more like God in our nature (we can never become God) through the acceptance and application of God’s grace this has nothing to do with the sin committed by our first parents who defied God’s sovereignty over good and evil.

One last note... you reference CCC 1849-1850. One of the greatest features of the Catechism is it’s cross-references. You should note that CCC 1850 cross references to the section of the Catechism I reference above (Specifically CCC 397). When examining the Catechism it is almost always helpful to explore the cross references to the paragraphs you are examining. More often than not, you will find that you can gain a fuller understanding of what the paragraphs actually mean by doing so.

Q: Is it a Mortal Sin to deliberately eat meat on a Friday in Lent? Can a Soul that was condemned to Hell in the 1950’s for eating meat on Christmas Day seek a commutation of his sentence to eternal Hell? Can that mortal sinner have his human rights restored that were taken away by Roman Catholic Cannon Law.

A: Let’s start with the basics of what mortal sin is. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us, “For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter (e.g., violation of the Ten Commandments) and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.” ([CCC 1857](#)) With mortal sin defined let’s recognize that abstinence from meat on Fridays of Lent is a precept of the Church ([CCC 2041-2043](#)) and according to the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) Theologians agree that failing to abstain on a defined day of abstinence is grave matter (Read about that [HERE](#)). Putting these things together, if the individual knew that failing to abstain from meat was grave matter, yet he/she deliberately and freely chose to do so anyway, that would indeed be a mortal sin.

As for the questions about Hell. The Catechism informs us that, “The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity.” ([CCC 1035](#)) This means there is no opportunity for a “second judgement” or “commutation” of one’s decision to choose hell. It is the individual’s free will choice to abandon God and live out eternity separated from God (this is what hell is). Hell is not something that God condemns people to or that the laws of his Church subject its members to. At the same time, there is nothing that can reverse that decision after one’s death and particular judgement.

That said, Jesus, in his infinite mercy gave us the great sacrament of reconciliation and empowered his priests to act on his behalf to forgive the mortal sins of those that contritely seek that forgiveness (see [JN 20:19-23](#)). Therefore, anyone who fails to choose the good in an area that constitutes grave matter commits a mortal sin can (and should) seek absolution through sacramental confession that would restore the individual to a state of grace. Again, its not the Catholic Church that takes away anyone’s “rights.” Is the individual freely choosing to act in defiance of God and then failing to repent of that choice that condemns one to hell.

Q: had a question about one of the new statements from the DDF, regarding the proper form for valid baptisms. I think it is good that there is proper form, but I do struggle to understand why the wrong words being used would/could render the baptism (or even ordination) invalid. If consecration of the host prior to Holy communion does not depend on the disposition of the soul or holiness of the priest consecrating the host, why does validity of the sacrament depend on specific words being used when

the intention to impart the sacrament is valid, in that the priest baptizing (or whomever may be baptizing) is truly meaning to impart that remission of original sin through them by God?

A: The importance of the proper form for Baptism is twofold. The first thing we should look at is that Jesus commanded (not suggested) it when he gave the Apostles the “Great Commission” stating, “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” ([MT 28:18-20](#)) The second thing we need to understand is that as the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us regarding the sacraments, “They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is **he who baptizes**, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.” ([CCC 1127](#)) When the minister of Baptism (ordinarily the Bishop, Priest or Deacon in the Latin rite) baptizes, he is doing it in the person of Christ (in persona Christi) and hence changing the form to use “we” (for example) would mean the minister is no longer recognizing that it is Christ who is baptizing. The “I” in the formular refers to Christ himself.

As for why the Sacraments are valid despite the spiritual disposition of the minister (or the recipient for that matter) it is tied to the same understanding of Christ himself being the true minister of the Sacraments. This is well described in the Catechism in [CCC 1128](#) which states, “... that the sacraments act ex opere operato (literally: “by the very fact of the action's being performed”), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows 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...”

Q: On the Gospel of St. Mark 7:10-12, will you kindly explain what does the verses mean? “For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die'; but you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban'(that is, given to God) then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,”

A: I would like to start by looking at a little more of that passage than you referenced as it provides important context as well as an explanation. If you look at Mark 7:5-13 it reads (Note: I have highlighted the portion of the passage you were questioning):

*“And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?’ And he said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ 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! **For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die’; but you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God) then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do.’”***

What is happening here is that the Jewish religious leaders are questioning why Jesus' disciples do not adhere to the Jewish ritual purity laws which called for a rigorous washing of hands prior to meals. Jesus responds by stating that it is hypocritical that they are so concerned with adherence to man made rules while, at the same time, ignoring the commandments of God. Jesus then goes on to provide an example using the fourth commandment – Honor your father and mother. The Jewish religious leaders had implemented a law which allowed one to practice Corban. Corban was a means by which one could make a pledge of sacrifice (money, valuables) to the temple and by doing so one would be relieved of the responsibility of providing financial support for their aging parents. In other words, the Temple leadership had decided that one could violate the fourth commandment if one would make a significant "donation" to the temple thereby, "making void the word of God."

Jesus points out that Isaiah prophesied about this occurring ([Isaiah 29:13](#)) 700 years earlier. Jesus uses Isaiah to "condemn" the pharisees as they would have been aware of the words of the prophet as studied religious and teachers of the Word of God. This makes their willingness to violate the Word of God as found in the fourth commandment in favor of financial gain for the Temple even more grave as they, of all people, should have known better. It also exposes their hypocrisy for what it really is.

This teaching is very much aligned with Jesus's teaching throughout the Gospels where he speaks about how the religious leaders of his time focused on things that provided no real spiritual benefit at the expense of those things that do indeed help one along the path of salvation. Another example of this can be found in [Mark 7:14-23](#) where Jesus speaks about some of the ritual dietary laws and how nothing entering one's digestive system from the outside can despoil a man. Rather, it is the evil thoughts that arise from inside the heart of man that despoils him.

Q: Hello, What does the priest mean by through him, with him, and in him during Mass? Is he saying that Jesus glorifies God the Father, and that God the Father is glorified alongside Jesus, and that God the Father is glorified in Jesus? Also, what do we mean when we say, at Mass, that it is just to thank God? Why is it just?

A: The priest says, "Through him, and with him, and in him, O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever," as he elevates the chalice with the Precious Blood and paten with the Precious Body of our Lord at the conclusion of the Eucharistic prayer. In response the assembly replies, "Amen!" signifying our belief in what has been said and that Jesus is truly present to us – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

This entire sentence has its roots in sacred scripture. "Through him, and with him, and in him ([Rom 11:36](#)), O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit ([Eph 4:3](#)), all glory and honor is yours ([Eph 3:20-21](#); [Rev 4:11](#)), for ever and ever." Simply put, as the celebrant is elevating the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is recognizing that our salvation is only possible through Jesus' salvific action, as we join him in sacrificing ourselves and worshipping the Father as members of his Body (the Body of Christ – the Church). Jesus told us that, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." ([Jn 14:6](#)) We are essentially repeating that sentiment as Jesus becomes really present for us on the altar as we recognize that without the way there is no moving forward, and without the truth there is no knowing the way and without the life of Jesus within us we cannot truly live.

As for why it is “just” to thank God... We say this as part of a sequence just prior to the Celebrant praying the preface to the Eucharistic Prayer. The sequence ends with the Celebrant praying, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” The assembly then replies, “It is right and just.” It is “right and just” to thank God simply because he is the author of creation and everything that exists, exists because of him and his constant desire to maintain it in existence. That alone would be enough, yet God goes further and gives us, his creations, unconditional love, going as far as entering into a covenant with us to make us adopted sons and daughters and not simply creations. If anything, the phrase, “It is right and just,” is a massive understatement.

Q: There is a guy in Poland who runs a YouTube channel, he is a protestant and he claims that our priests from the Catholic Church do not have authority to pass " the power" from one priest to another and he gives some passages from the scriptures ACTS 1 21-23 (this one I do not understand honestly speaking), Psalm 146 3-4 (no trust in human beings), Hebrew 10 18 (sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary), all in all he claims that priests are not needed anymore and that everyone is a kind of a priest 1 Peter 2:8.

A: I believe what you are looking for is a defense of the ministerial priesthood. Let’s start by identifying the areas which we agree with the gentleman on YouTube. As Catholics we would agree that we are, “...to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” ([1 Peter 2:5](#)) and that we part of, “...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...” ([1 Peter 2:9](#)) We see this outlined in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in CCC 784, 901, 941, 1119, 1141-1143, 1268, 1273, and 1546-1547. We also believe what Psalm 146 is telling us when it advises us that we should not, “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no help. When his breath departs, he returns to his earth; on that very day his plans perish.” ([Psalm 146:3-4](#)) We should place our trust firmly in God who has nothing but our eternal good in mind as part of his providential plans. Finally, we agree that our ministerial priests do not have the ability to pass their ordination on to others - only Bishops may ordain priests.

That said, just because we as “kingdom priests” share in the priesthood of Christ (he is our one and only high priest) and that we must ultimately place our trust in God and not men, it does not mean that Jesus did not establish a ministerial priesthood to offer sacrifice to the Father and confecting the sacraments by serving in persona Christi (in the person of Christ). In our Mass It is Jesus the high priest, working through his ministerial priest (who serves in persona Christi – in the person of Christ) to offer himself as sacrifice to the Father as we enter into the one and final sacrifice of Christ ([Hebrews 7:27](#)). We, as kingdom priests, participate in this remembrance of this sacrifice by offering ourselves alongside Jesus. St. Paul tells us this is our duty when he writes to the Romans stating, “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” ([Romans 12:1](#)) We see Jesus himself institute this sacrificial memorial practice at the Last Supper ([Matthew 26:26-29](#); [Mark 14:22-24](#); [Luke 22:19-20](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#)) and command that do this in remembrance of him. We are told very clearly that this is a sacrificial offering ([1 Corinthians 10:16-22](#)) and that this sacrifice is something we must offer and is necessary for the forgiveness of sins ([Hebrews 9:22](#); [Ephesians 5:1-2](#)). It was at the last supper the Jesus instituted the priesthood (see this [ARTICLE](#) for more support for that claim).

As for this YouTubers reference of the election of Matthais in [Acts 1:15-26](#) he seems to be contradicting himself as we clearly see here that the office of Bishop can be passed on. In this case, the remaining Bishops (Apostles were the first Bishops) meet to elect a replacement for Judas demonstrating that the office of Bishop does not “die” with its human occupant but can and must be passed on. Later in Acts ([Acts 15:2, 6, 22-23](#)) we hear about the office of “Elder” also known as “Presbyter” from which we derive the English word “Priest.” Throughout the New Testament letters, we continue to see references to the ordination, governance and purpose of the Priests / Elders ([1 Timothy 4:14, 5:17-19; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-5; James 5:14-15](#)).

The bottom line is that it is very clear Jesus himself established the Priesthood, to carry represent the one and only sacrifice that is of any value – the sacrifice of Jesus himself. When we read that Sacrifice is no longer necessary and of no value to God ([Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Psalm 40:6-8; Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:11-17; Hebrews 10:4-10; Matthew 9:13; Mark 12:33](#)) we are speaking of animal sacrifices. These sacrifices were never capable of atoning for sin. It is only the one pure sacrifice of Jesus that our ministerial priests represent for us (in adherence to Jesus’ command) that is of any value.

I hope that helps. If you want a little more regarding the biblical blueprint for the ministerial priesthood you can find it [HERE](#).

Through 02/05/24

Q: What happened to Jesus before he rose again? Asleep? With God? (During the 3 Days)

A: During the three days that Jesus was in the tomb, he experienced a real death; he was not simply asleep. Jesus’ body, however, was preserved from corruption by the power of God. The preservation of Jesus’ body was necessary to demonstrate both His divinity and His humanity. Jesus’ resurrection was the final proof that he was indeed divine and was in fact the second person of the Trinity, God the Son.

Both scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us insight as to what happened to Jesus during that three-day period (Good Friday Night, Holy Saturday, and early Easter Sunday morning) that his body lie dead in the tomb. Jesus himself tells us that, “I have not yet ascended to the Father,” ([Jn 20:17](#)) during his encounter with Mary Magdelene following his resurrection. Therefore, we know Jesus was not with God (either in his divine nature or human soul) during his time in the tomb.

We get insight into what did happen to Jesus during those three days in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) which informs us that, “The frequent New Testament affirmations (e.g., Acts 3:15; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:20; Heb 13:20) that Jesus was ‘raised from the dead presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection. This was the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ’s descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there ([1 Pet 3:18–19](#)).” ([CCC 632](#))

In other words, as we profess the Apostles Creed, “he descended into hell.” When we pray these words we are professing belief that while Jesus was dead in the tomb his human soul travelled

to the place of the righteous dead (those that died in God's friendship but could not enter heaven as the gates of heaven had not yet been opened) to let them know the savior had arrived and that they could now proceed to their eternal destiny in heaven (what a glorious day that must have been!). Many people get confused by the description of Jesus' descent into hell assuming that what is being referred to is the hell of damnation. However, the word that is used in the Creed that we translate into English as "Hell" is "Hades" in the original Greek which refers to the place of all the dead – those suffering in the hell of the damned as well as the righteous dead waiting for the arrival of the savior.

The bottom line is Jesus suffered real death, his human soul separated from his body at death as happens with all humans, and that soul travelled to the place of the dead (as all human souls did up to that point). Being the most righteous, Jesus did not go to the Hell of the damned. Rather he went to the Hell of the righteous dead to let them know that their wait was over and that the gates of heaven had been opened to them.

Q: Any Scriptural reference for purgatory?

A: This is a doctrine that has been well flushed out and established in the Church since the early centuries. That said, the Catholic Church is not limited to Sacred Scripture in establishing its doctrines. The Catholic Church is a Church of the Word of God in both its forms – written (Sacred Scripture) and oral (Holy Tradition – Jesus's teaching passed on to the Apostles but not written down). As Saint Paul writes to the Church in Thessalonica, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." (2 TH 2:15)

That said, it is very easy to make a case for Purgatory using Sacred Scripture alone:

- Step 1: Scripture teaches us that nothing impure will enter heaven – See REV 21:27; MT 5:48; HEB 12:14
- Step 2: Scripture teaches us that there will be purification required for those that are not perfect – See 1 COR 3:15; MT 5:26 (no one is released from Hell); JAM 3:2 (we all fall short)
- Step 3: Scripture teaches us that we should pray for the dead. If they are in heaven there is no reason to pray for them. If they are in hell our prayers are of no value as hell is permanent. Therefore, there must be a third state that the dead can experience where our prayers can provide some value and help move on heaven – we call this purgatory – See 2 MACC 12:44-46; 2 TIM 1:16-18

If you want anymore this [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers should provide you with a nice overview as it references everything above and adds some color.

Q: Where does holy water come from?

A: The use of holy water in the Catholic Church dates back to the earliest days of the Christian Era as you can read in this [ENTRY](#) from the Catholic Encyclopedia. Holy water is simply ordinary water (could be mineral, spring or tap) that has been blessed by a priest with a solemn prayer to beg God's blessing on those who use it and protection from the powers of darkness. The water blessed on Holy Saturday, or Easter Water, differs from the holy water blessed at other times in

that the Easter water is blessed with greater solemnity, with the paschal candle, representing Our Lord risen from the dead, being dipped into it with a special prayer.

Holy water serves as a reminder of our Baptism which is why you find it at the entrances of a Church in the small holy water fonts. As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us, “Holy Mother Church has, moreover, instituted sacramentals (holy water is a sacramental). These 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...Sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church’s prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it.” ([CCC 1667-1670](#))

Q: Since this year is leap year do we celebrate “Ash Thursday?” Do we endure 41 days of Lent this year?

A: The calendar dates associated with Lent and Easter vary every year as they are calculated using the Jewish Lunar calendar unlike a feast like Christmas which is fixed on a specific calendar day of the year (e.g., December 25th). Having an extra day in the calendar month of February has no effect on those calculations for Lent and Easter just as it would have no impact on a feast that falls on a fixed calendar day. The beginning of Lent is determined by the date of Easter. Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox. Six Sundays back from that Sunday plus 4 days to Wednesday is the first day of Lent, AKA Ash Wednesday.

Again, adding an extra day into the month of February has no impact on the length of Lent. That said Lent is not forty days long. According to the General Norms, “Lent runs from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, exclusive” (General Norms 28). This means Lent ends at the beginning of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday. Count it as you will, that’s more than forty days. Therefore, the number forty in traditional hymns such as “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” is only an approximation.

Q: When receiving the eucharist is alright, if I can receive it while I kneel?

A: Of course! When we enter a Church, we genuflect (bring our right knee to the ground) to the tabernacle in reverence as our Lord is present there. We also profoundly bow when passing in front of the Altar as our Lord is made present there each and every Mass. For over a millennium, reception of the Eucharist was traditionally done while kneeling at an altar rail as a means of expressing reverence and humility in the presence of our Lord (Who, by the way, continuously humbles himself by being substantially present for us in the form of simple bread and wine.).

The [General Instructions for the Roman Missal](#) (GIRM) which defines everything (postures, movements, physical structure, vessels used, art displayed, furniture deployed, etc....) as part of our celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass makes it clear that we should express maximum reverence when receiving communion (see Part II of the GIRM for the “Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion, paragraph #41). Since kneeling is the recognized as the ultimate posture of reverence and humility it is perfectly aligned with the instructions of the GIRM. That said, everyone has different spiritualities and physical

capabilities. As long as it is not explicitly denied by the instructions of the GIRM, any reverent posture is permitted – standing, kneeling or sitting (if physical limitations demand it).

Q: What does it mean in 1 Corinthians 13:10, when the complete comes? In the KJV it says when that which is perfect. I grew up Fundamentalist Baptist and they taught that the Bible, specifically the KJB, was what it was referring to that was perfect or complete. Also, tying into that passage, I was always taught that it showed that Tradition is no longer needed because even though the Apostles handed down teachings orally and by tradition, now that the Bible is complete Tradition is no longer necessary - we have everything written. We now have Sola Scriptura.

A: I am not sure where the individual that taught you that this passage was referring to the Bible and the end of the need for Tradition got that teaching from. This verse is part of a longer dialog on “Gifts and Graces” that runs from 12:1-14:40. The section within that dialog where this verse appears (13:1-13:13) is clearly talking about charity (love). It is speaking to the fact that the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge are always imperfect and that when we are in God’s presence (that is what the “perfect” or “complete” is speaking of – confirmed later in the passage when St. Paul speaks of us being face to face) these gifts will no longer be necessary or useful and will “pass away.” St. Paul is comparing these gifts to childish things that we give up when we mature and making it clear that when we are “face to face” with God we will no longer need these gifts and they will have no value. However, he is also stating that Love will remain. As The Navarre Bible / Commentary on [Saint Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians](#), (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 2005) informs us:

“Love is enduring; it will never disappear. In this sense it is greater than all God’s other gifts to man; each of those gifts is designed to help man reach perfection and eternal beatitude; charity, on the other hand, is beatitude, blessedness, itself. A thing is imperfect, St Thomas comments, for one of two reasons—either because it contains certain defects, or because it will later be superseded. In this second sense knowledge of God and prophecy are overtaken by seeing God face to face. “Charity, on the other hand, which is love of God, does not disappear but, rather, increases; the more perfect one’s knowledge of God, the more perfectly does one love him” (St Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on 1 Cor, ad loc.)”

As a defense for Sola Scriptura, use of this passage is beyond weak. It borders on nonsensical. That said, Sola Scriptura is self-refuting anyway. If the Bible is the sole rule of faith than it should say that somewhere in the Bible and it does not. In addition, it was Tradition that defined the contents of the New Testament. It took several centuries for the Church (all were Catholic then) to settle on an agreed upon New Testament Canon of scripture. It was not until local Catholic Church councils in the late fourth century that the Canon was officially defined. Until then there were several books in the New Testament that were questioned (e.g., Hebrews) and others that were be considered for inclusion that were left out (e.g., First Clement).

Sola Scriptura was a doctrine created by the original Protestant Reformers (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin) in the 16th Century. For the first 1,500 years of Christianity the entirety of the Word of God – both written and orally transmitted - was used to define the rule of faith. Even a casual review of St. Paul’s writings in the New Testament makes it clear that he was NOT a believer in

Sola Scriptura. Here is a sample of the verses from the New Testament that make it clear Sola Scriptura was never a thought in the early Church (most from St. Paul):

- “I commend you because you remember me in everything and **maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you.**” 1 Corinthians 11:2
- “So then, brethren, 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
- “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the **tradition that you received** from us.” 2 Thessalonians 3:6
- ““But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!” But they have not all heeded the gospel; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So, **faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.**” Romans 10:14-17
- “First of all, you must understand this, that **no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation**, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” 2 Peter 1:20-21 (*particularly important verse as it demonstrates there needs to be an authoritative source – the Magisterium of the Catholic Church – to ensure proper interpretation*)
- “...speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them **hard to understand**, which the ignorant and unstable **twist to their own destruction**, as they do the other scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:16 (*reinforces what the verse above warns of – without the Magisterium bringing Tradition to bear erroneous interpretations of scripture will lead believers astray*)
- “And he said to them, “Go into all the world and **preach the gospel to the whole creation**. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:15–16

The last verse listed is particularly interesting as Jesus never wrote anything nor did he command his Apostles to write anything (the last book of the New Testament was not even written until the end of the 1st century and most New Testament books were written between 55-90 AD). Jesus was the master of oral teaching and spent three years training his Disciples to do the same. Jesus then commanded his apostles to go out and preach (not write).

The verses that support Sola Scriptura all have significant weaknesses. Here are just three of the most commonly used verses and their flaws:

- “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - Only the OT scriptures existed when this was written. So does this mean we don’t need the NT?

- “All” is not “Only.” Catholics agree that, “All scripture is inspired by God.” It just doesn’t mean that scripture is the “Only” rule of faith.
- *“I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another...” 1 Corinthians 4:6*
 - Ignores the context - Paul chastising for dissention / factions in this passage.
 - Little of the New Testament was written at this time. Was he telling us to focus only on what was written up to that point?
 - Interpretation conflicts with several other Pauline writings (see above) so it CAN’T be referring to Sacred Scripture – Scripture can’t conflict with itself.
- *“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” Revelation 22:18-19*
 - “This book” – not referring to the Bible but this book of the Bible – there are 73 books in the literary library that is the Bible. Revelation is only one and it is clear that nothing should be added to it or taken away from it.

Back to the verse in question... I hope you can now see that trying to interpret or offering an interpretation of a single verse will almost always lead to disaster. To arrive at a proper interpretation, one needs to consider the entirety of Sacred Scripture starting with the passage in which the verse appears, then expanding out to the surrounding passages and eventually the entire book. Even then, one must consider the remaining 72 books of the Bible as the Bible is a unified work that tells one continuous story about Christ and cannot conflict with itself.

Q: I have a question from my 7-year-old son: We heard sometime at Mass I think in the last couple of weeks after Christmas (perhaps in the Gospel?) the mention of Herod's son. My son asked me after "Who was Herod's son?", and I honestly have never thought of it and I don't even think the exact name was mentioned. Do you think you could give me some idea of who Herod's son was, and maybe what he was known for ... what he did, etc?

A: It is great that your son is asking these questions. We hear of several Herods in the New Testament starting with Herod the Great who was known for the many grand buildings he erected during his lengthy “rule” of Israel as the puppet king put in place by the Romans. It was Herod the Great that we hear about in [MT 2:1-18](#) who met with the Magi, had all the boys in Bethlehem 2 years and younger killed (seeking to kill Jesus), and who we later find out dies while Jesus, Mary and Joseph were in Egypt hiding from him ([MT 2:13-15](#) – flight to Egypt; [MT 2:19-23](#) – return from Egypt). Herod the Great was known not only for his building but for his cruelty. Herod actually had several of his sons killed fearing that they were trying to usurp him so it was no surprise that he would kill all the infants in Bethlehem in the hope of killing the child the Magi has spoken to him about.

Following Herod the Great’s death, two of his sons were given responsibility for his “kingdom” by the Romans – Archelaus in the south and Antipas in the North. Archelaus was known to be as cruel as his father and his rule did not last long. The fact that Archelaus was ruling the south is the reason that Joseph took his family and settled in Nazareth (in the North) upon their return

from Egypt (see [MT 2:19-23](#)). Following Archelaus removal/death the Romans placed a Roman Governor in his place. It was Pontius Pilot who was the Governor at the time of Jesus' ministry that presided over his trial and sentenced him to death.

Antipas continued to rule in the North and was known as Herod Antipas. We read about this Herod in Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 3/9/13/23, and Acts 4/12. It was this Herod that had John the Baptist arrested and killed and later met with Jesus during his trial. The [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) has a sound entry on Herod the Great that also provide some good detail on his two sons that ruled after him – Archelaus and Antipas. You can find that entry [HERE](#).

Q: In Galatians 2:11-14 Paul calls out Peter for being hypocritical. Some Protestants use this incident as evidence that Jesus never intended to build his Church on Peter, who is clearly quite fallible in this case. What are the main arguments against the Papacy of Peter as leader of Christ's Church? How would you respond to the contention that these verses present a threat to the Church's teaching about the Chair of Peter?

A: Let's start with your second question first, "How would you respond to the contention that these verses present a threat to the Church's teaching about the Chair of Peter?" In response I would point out that the Protestants in question have a misunderstanding about the Catholic Doctrine of papal infallibility. That doctrine does not declare that the Pope is not able to make a mistake – the Pope was not declared impeccable. Popes make mistakes all the time. As a matter of fact, some of the Popes in our 2,000-year history have been outrageous sinners who have made significant moral mistakes, while ALL of our Popes (even the Saints) have made mistakes outside of the realm of official declarations on faith and morals.

The Doctrine of papal infallibility declares that the Holy Spirit will prevent the Pope from making an error when declaring a teaching on faith and morals that all Catholics must adhere and assent to. The doctrine is very narrow in scope and there is specific language that the Pope must use when making such a declaration. This language makes it clear that an infallible declaration is being made that the Catholic faithful are beholden to.

I would then go on to point out that this was far from the first and most serious mistake that Peter made. Peter clearly made a mistake when he denied Christ ([MT 26:69-75](#)). This is a mistake that Jesus himself knew about before Peter even made it ([MT 26:30-35](#)). Yet, Jesus goes on to pray specifically for Peter to return and guide his brethren after he betrays him ([LK 22:31-32](#)). Following the resurrection, we see Jesus confirming Peter's role as the leader of his Church (a role explicitly given to him in [MT 16:18-19](#) – referencing [JS 22:22](#)) with his threefold demand to lead his sheep ([JN 21:15-19](#)). The bottom line is that Peter's authority did not depend on him being impeccable but rather on Christ giving him "the keys" signifying that he would be acting as Christ's Prime Minister with authority to speak and act on his behalf following his ascension.

As for the first question, "What are the main arguments against the Papacy of Peter as leader of Christ's Church?", there is nothing in Sacred Scripture that provides a good argument against the Papacy of Peter. Quite the contrary, the overwhelming evidence is that Peter was identified as a leader from the onset (one reason why Peter always speaks on behalf of the other Apostles). Christ's change of Peter's name from Simon to Peter, like all divine name changes in the Bible (see Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, etc...) mark God's intention to set him apart for a special role in his plan for man's redemption. That role is clearly the Papacy.

The best scriptural argument against Peter's primacy comes from the account of the council of Jerusalem ([Acts 15:1-29](#)) which occurs chronologically after the dispute between Paul and Peter recounted in Galatians. In this passage we see James, the presumptive Bishop of Jerusalem, making the final declaration of the council. Yet, that declaration was made in response to Peter recounting what God had revealed to him. It was Peter's declaration that shaped the council. The fact that James made the pronouncement does not mean Peter was not the Pope, just that James was speaking as the leader of the Church in Jerusalem and the likely host of the council.

Outside of Sacred Scripture we need to look at what the early Church was doing and it is clear that the successors to Peter wielded primacy of authority over the Church. The best and most complete arguments for and against Papal supremacy can be found in Erick Ybarra's book entitled, *The Papacy: Revisiting the Debate Between Catholics and Orthodox* (Emmaus Road Publishing; Steubenville, OH; 2022). In that book the author presents the best arguments against Papal supremacy through the entire history of Christianity. Most readers will find that the arguments against supremacy are weak and those for it are strong based upon how the Church behaved from its inception on Pentecost to today.

Q: Why did God allow for slavery in the Old Testament?

A: Thanks for the question. It is a good one. One of the many things we learn from a careful reading of Sacred Scripture is that God worked with humanity as it evolved intellectually, socially, and morally. Often, God would allow certain practices because he understood that, as what were essentially "barbaric children," humanity would not be able to accept the fullness of revelation. Jesus himself, demonstrates this in [Matthew 19:7-8](#) where the Pharisees question Jesus about divorce: "They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.'" God needed humanity to evolve to the point where it could accept his plan for all humanity and his teaching on human dignity.

In the Old Testament, God allowed for slavery as a social institution, but it is important to note that the Mosaic law was against any kind of involuntary slavery. In ancient civilizations most slaves sold themselves into slavery to pay a debt or to be taken care of when they had no prospects for income to support themselves. We read about rules set-up in the Mosaic law to protect slaves in [Exodus 21](#). While the Bible does not explicitly denounce the inherent wrong of slavery, it does address the abuses and evil possibilities of the institution. St. Paul, in his letters, taught that Christian slaves should be treated with forbearance and obedience, and he emphasized the spiritual equality of all believers.

It is important to understand that the Bible and Church teaching evolved over time, and the understanding of human dignity and the equality of all people has developed further in light of the Gospel message. While slavery was tolerated in the Old Testament, the principles of equality and respect for human dignity laid the foundation for the eventual prohibition of slavery. The Church has consistently condemned the enslavement of human beings and recognizes it as a grave violation of human rights.

The bottom line is that God tolerated the evil of slavery knowing he could turn it into a good (I would imagine that there are many former slaves who are experiencing the beatific vision for

eternity right now). As humanity evolved and could be held accountable for the evil of slavery (just like we hold a 3-year-old to a different level of accountability than a teenager for the same act) God revealed more about human dignity. The teachings regarding the evil of all slavery emerged from this revelation.

Q: What's the meaning of Exodus 4:24-26? Why does God try to kill Moses?

A: This is one of those tricky passages that leaves most of us scratching our heads. The good news is that there have been many much smarter people (that have a far greater understanding of the language and context in the ancient civilizations) that have come before us and studied this over the last 2,000 years. I am going to lean on one of my favorite commentaries to provide you an answer on this one – The Navarre Bible Commentary (James Gavigan, Brian McCarthy, and Thomas McGovern, eds., The Pentateuch, The Navarre Bible; Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 1999; pgs. 263–264) - which informs us as follows:

This is a puzzling episode because it concerns superstitious healing practices which are unknown nowadays: Moses falls gravely ill (this is what it means when it says the Lord “met him and sought to kill him”) and Zipporah interprets this as meaning that he has committed some fault. So she proceeds to circumcise the boy and also Moses himself (the mention of Moses’ “feet” seems an obvious euphemism). So, this circumcision seems to be a religious rite, propitiatory in character and somehow connected with marital relations, since his wife refers to him as “a bridegroom of blood”. Many theories based on what circumcision meant to the Midianites have been put forward to explain this expression and the whole ritual; but so far none of them is very satisfactory. The Fathers tended to comment on the passage allegorically, saying that Moses blessed his wife and children by means of this rite, to give them a share in the fruits of his salvific mission. Anyway, it does seem as though the sacred writer included this episode in order to show that Moses, the leader and lawgiver of the people, himself underwent circumcision before all the sons of Israel had to.

I think that about covers it for you. I hope that helps.

Q: I have a Baptist friend that recently posted the Reformation's 5 Solas. Is there a single place where I can find answers to each of these? I am currently in OCIA and coming into the church this Easter: sola scriptura (Scripture alone), solus Christus (Christ alone), sola fide (faith alone), sola gratia (grace alone), and soli Deo gloria (glory to God alone).

A: Thanks for the question. It is one that has been addressed multiple times by many apologists over the years. This [LINK](#) will bring you to a Catholic Answers podcast where your question is the first one answered and you can click on it and hear Jimmy Akin’s response detailing what the five solas are and how to respond to them from a Catholic perspective. In that response Jimmy does not address sola scriptura and sola fide in detail as the caller said he did not need to. Therefore, the links below would be simple resources (and quick reads) you can use to fill in the gaps in Jimmy’s response:

Sola Scriptura: <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/a-quick-ten-step-refutation-of-sola-scriptura> ; <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/sola-scriptura-is-not-so>

[easy-to-kill](https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/the-best-argument-for-sola-scriptura) ; <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/the-best-argument-for-sola-scriptura>

Sola Fide: <https://www.catholic.com/audio/cot/my-big-question-for-defenders-of-sola-fide> ;
<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/galatians-216-and-sola-fide> ;
<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/when-faith-alone-meets-scripture-alone>

I hope that helps.

Through 01/29/24

Q: Hello Every time I meditate on the fifth joyful mystery, the finding of Jesus in the temple, I wonder why Jesus would cause his parents such anxiety by leaving them and not telling them where he would be. It almost seems He was being disobedient or at least unconcerned for them. How should I meditate on this mystery? (ps. I'm a Mom)

A: I totally understand your perspective as a Father myself. I often looked at Jesus' action in that instant as disobedient and disrespectful. However, I would like to offer you another perspective that makes more sense upon a close reading of the Gospel of Luke. Clearly when you read [LK 2:48](#) you get the impression that Mary and Joseph were disappointed with Jesus as it reads, "...and when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.'" However, in the very next line Jesus explains that it was not an act of rebellion, and his intention was not to cause anxiety when he says, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ([LK 2:49](#)) While Mary and Joseph did not immediately understand what he was trying to tell them we hear that, "...his mother kept all these things in her heart." ([LK 2:51](#))

Therefore, if Jesus was not intending to disobey or cause anxiety, we must seek out something that would explain another possible reason for this action. Jesus clearly knew his parents would be anxious, so we need to look to how causing this anxiety could be turned to a greater good. We must remember that both Mary and Joseph know who Jesus was (see [LK 1:26-38](#) and [MT 1:18-25](#)). Mary and Joseph may not have fully grasped that knowledge at Jesus' conception and birth, but over time, it was events like this one in the Temple that clarified things for them.

That said, I like to think Jesus had another intention in the temple incident as a child – he was preparing Mary for his death and resurrection. Jesus was absent from his parents for parts of three days during the temple incident. When he was "found," Jesus was clear that his parents should have known where he would be if he was not with Mary and Joseph. Mary kept this thought in her heart and during Jesus's three-year mission she, like all the other disciples would have been a witness to Jesus telling them three separate times that he would be killed and rise from the dead ([LK 9:22](#); [9:43-45](#); [18:31-33](#)) which would have given her more "food for thought."

Following Jesus' death, we find that Mary, his mother, did not accompany the other women to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning to properly anoint the body that was hastily buried Friday

evening. This makes no sense whatsoever, unless Mary believed in the resurrection before it occurred. Many theologians speculate that this was indeed the case. In other, words, Mary's experience with Jesus in the temple as a child prepared her for her Jesus's death and resurrection where he would once again be separated from her for parts of three days only to miraculously "reappear."

Therefore, rather than meditating on thoughts of Jesus' bad behavior while praying this mystery, one should meditate on the mercy he was showing his Mother by preparing her for an even greater trial of faith later in life. Rather than an act of disobedience it was an act of love, preparing those closest to him throughout Jesus' life for the ultimate challenge of that life.

Q: I was listening to the Catholic Answers Podcast with Jimmy Aiken on January 25th 2004 and Jimmy had answered a question from a caller regarding the epicurean paradox. My question is that if we have complete confidence in God's Divine Providence (and that nothing happens without God willing it or permitting it - would it be safe to say that there is the exact amount of evil in this world as there should be?

A: On that segment Jimmy did indeed speak to the problem of evil and the arguments for and against it. He pointed out the epicurean argument is just a sub form of the more traditional arguments and that most philosophers (including skeptics) would not use it as it is easily argued against. The point Jimmy was focusing on was that God permits evils only to the extent that he can draw a greater good out of that evil. So, you are correct in saying that Jimmy was indeed pointing out that, "...nothing happens without God willing it or permitting it."

That said, your conclusion that, "...there is the exact amount of evil in this world as there should be" does not logically derive from God's permitting evil if by "exact" you mean a certain preset amount. God did not create evil; evil was introduced by our first parents choosing themselves over God. As a result, there "should be" no evil. Since God does permit certain evils – moral and natural – understanding that he can use that to generate a greater good (e.g., God allows a Mass murder or devastating natural disaster knowing it will give others the opportunity to exercise virtue and grow in love of neighbor). Therefore, there is no set limit to the amount of evil God will allow if there is a means to generate a greater good from it.

Q: A couple of quick questions that are somewhat related. What, if any, are the Catholic views on limitation of freedom of speech and freedom of religion? I know that things like blasphemy laws used to exist and many churchmen seemed to have supported them, though I don't know the Church's official view on that or when speech should be restricted. Are there any magisterial documents or articles from trusted theologians on this topic? Same for freedom of religion. The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaims that religious liberty stems from man's dignity and not being forced to follow a religion against his will. But when it comes to certain religions, is it ever proper for the state to restrict or even ban?

A: The official teaching of the Catholic Church on freedom of speech emphasizes the importance of truth, justice, and moderation in the exercise of this right. The exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is considered an inalienable requirement of human dignity, but it does not entail the right to say or do anything. The presumption is in favor of freedom of expression, but this is not an absolute, indefeasible norm from an ethical perspective. Instances such as libel, slander, messages fostering hatred, obscenity, and pornography are highlighted as

not having a right to communicate, and free expression should always observe principles like truth, fairness, and respect for privacy.

You can find a summary of Church teaching relative to the need to bear witness to the truth, offenses against the truth, respect for the truth and the use of the social communication media in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in paragraphs [CCC 2471-2499](#). You can find a similar summary of the Churches religious freedom views in [CCC 2104-2109](#). If you would like a more detailed magisterial reference for the Church's view of freedom of speech you can find it in Pope John XXIII encyclical [Pacem in Terris](#). You can find an expanded discussion of the Church's position on religious freedom in Pope Paul VI declaration on religious freedom [Dignitatus Humanae](#). These extended magisterial discussions combined with the Catechism references should answer all the questions you have and more.

Q: I'm currently preparing to enter the Church at Easter, and shortly before that I'll have my first confession, when I'll need to confess 30 years' worth of sins (since I was baptised as an infant in a protestant church). This is daunting, to say the least, and I'm very concerned to make sure that I get all my sins taken care of, and not to leave any out. I realise that any sins I've forgotten will still be forgiven, but my concern is more about things I remember doing, but either not realising that they're sinful, or listing them under one category of sin when they actually don't belong there and should be confessed as a separate kind of sin that I don't confess. I realise that I may be overthinking this and at risk of scrupulosity, but at the same time, this is a very serious business, and looking back at my life so far and trying to work out what to confess and in what way is getting quite overwhelming. I'd be grateful for any tips you might have on making a full and valid confession over a very long time period when I'm still not exactly sure how to define and classify my sins. On a related topic, I'm also concerned about the penance the priest may give me for this confession - that it will either be extremely onerous, and maybe even beyond my capacity to perform, or so light that it feels like a slap on the wrist and doesn't give me enough of a chance to heal. How proportional do penances tend to be for confessions covering such time periods, and am I allowed to do additional penance if I don't feel like what the priest asks is enough? Many thanks and God bless you for all your work.

A: See below:

1) *How to prepare for Confession?*

- a. The first thing I would recommend is that you contact your parish and ask to set-up a specific time to have what is known as a "general confession." This would be done in the parish office 1:1 with the Priest where he could give you all the time you need and help you walk through the process in a relaxed atmosphere. This way you would not keep those in the confession line waiting on the completion of your confession or put the priest in the position where he feels he must rush you through it since others are in line.
- b. The next thing I would do it download a solid Examination of Conscience and set aside some prayer time to walk through it. These templates help one call to mind their sins by asking a series of questions. They are quite helpful and many will actually bring the examination with highlights and notes to the confession with them to ensure the confession is as complete as it can be.
 - i. Here is one that is Ten Commandments based = >
<https://www.archgh.org/media/16364/examination-of-conscience-final.pdf>

- ii. Here is another that is Ten Commandments based that is more detailed and gives you some helpful hints about the confession process => <https://bulldogcatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/a-detailed-catholic-examination-of-conscience-2nd-ed.pdf>
- iii. Here is another site that has several good examines specific to one's state in life => <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience>
- iv. Since you are concerned about being able to clearly identify mortal sins, this is a list of mortal sins tied to the specific passages in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that speaks to them => https://www.holyannunciation.com/images/List_of_Grave_Sins_from_the_Catechism_of_the_Catholic_Church.pdf

2) Penance too heavy or too light?

- a. This is a concern that many people have. You should not worry about it. Most penances that are assigned, while proportional to the sins committed (# and kind), are often quite simple. This leaves most people with the feeling that not enough was done to balance the scales of justice. The reality is that in most case one would be correct – the scales are not balanced by the penance assigned and performed.
- b. You should be aware that the Priest will also be performing the assigned penance. This is not widely known, but this is indeed part of what a Priest is required to do (See the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)). A Priest, "...must pray and do penance for his penitent, entrusting him to the Lord's mercy." ([CCC 1466](#))
- c. If you feel the penance is too light you are always welcome to do more and it can only foster your spiritual good. The Corporal and Spiritual works of mercy are a great means of performing a penance by giving of yourself to others. You can also take some advice from the Catechism's section on penance ([CCC 1434-1439](#)) and satisfaction ([CCC 1459-1460](#)).

I think you will find that after your general confession you will have much greater clarity regarding the process and its demands. That clarity is just one of the graces that come from the sacrament itself.

Q: If a widowed person wanted to remarry and they have their original marriage certificate from a Catholic Church, but cannot find their confirmation and communion information. Can they not still get married in a Catholic Church? They have their baptismal certificate.

A: Different dioceses and different Churches within a diocese have different policies when it comes to documentation of sacramental reception and what is acceptable as a form of documentation. Some may accept the marriage certificate from a Catholic Church as a likely indicator that a party was confirmed and received their first communion. However, someone can get married in a Catholic Church without being Catholic and be listed on the certificate. As a result, many Churches do not accept that for this purpose. Having the Baptismal record is helpful as it demonstrates that you were Baptized Catholic, but most Churches could (and likely would) require more. That said, Churches will work with you and find a way to get what is needed.

Here are your options:

1. Contact the Church that issued the Baptism certificate and ask them if they have records of the Confirmation and First Communion noted. When someone gets Confirmed and receives their First Communion a record of that sacrament being conferred is sent to the parish where the individual's Baptism took place. If they have this on file, they can send you a new Baptism Certificate with the notations about the other Sacraments and that would suffice for all parishes.
2. Contact the Church(es) where you were Confirmed and received your First Communion. If you give them an approximate year, they will be able to locate the record of the Sacrament in their Sacramental Registry and be able to produce and send you a replacement certificate.
3. Have a witness to the reception of the Sacraments write a letter attesting to the reception at a specific Church on or about a specific month, day, and year. Some parishes may require two affidavit letters but almost all will accept them as proof.

I would start by asking the Church where you are planning on getting married if they will accept the combination of the Baptismal record and marriage certificate as proof. Next, I would pursue the Baptismal record annotations and/or the replacement certificates. The last path I would pursue would be the witness attestations / affidavits.

Q: I feel like I've been crying out to God for a long time now with no answer and has started to make me doubt his existence sometimes and that brings me a lot of anxiety and depression, my question is would sin prevent God from answering my prayers and showing me he's there? What confuses me that if that is the reason my prayers are going unanswered is that we are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God and why would he be ignoring me over sin when we are all sinners.

A: The bottom line is God answers all prayers. Sometimes God answers, "Yes;" sometimes God answers, "No;" and sometime God answers, "Not Yet." God is not a cosmic vending machine where we insert prayers, and he delivers the goods. God's providential plan is focused on our eternal good – for all humanity and for each of us individually. This plan is perfect in every way, and, if what we are seeking is aligned with that plan it can be granted. However, often what we seek is what we believe to be in our own best interests based upon our finite view of events and the brokenness of our natures. This is where trust and faith come in. We must always trust in God's plan as it is guaranteed to be the best one for us for eternal life. This means our prayers need to be informed by God's will and, rather than seek specific intentions, we should be seeking to better understand God's will for us and the courage, skill, and fortitude to respond to it.

God is not "ignoring" your prayers because of sin in your life but his answer to those prayers may be "No" or "Not Now." Those answers may be an indication that the way you are living your life is not aligned with God's plan for you. In these situations, we need to take a step back and examine whether we are living a life that is aligned with the model Christ gave us and the teachings he handed on to his Church to safeguard and transmit. If we find we are not living up to Christ's expectations, and are not working to do so (we can't simply say all men are sinners as an excuse for our sins), it should not surprise us that our plans are not aligned with God's and the answers to our prayers are negative. I would encourage you to begin praying for the grace and strength to overcome your sins and put them behind you so that you can better discern God's plan. Once you are aligned with God's plan, I assure you that you will find your prayers are answered in the affirmative more often than not.

Q: I have 2 questions that I hope you can help with 1. Will god forgive me if I put my hand on the bible, swear that I'm telling the truth, while lying? 2. Will god forgive me and what will happen if I swear to god, I swear on someone's life that I won't ever do something and end up doing it?

A: There is no sin that God cannot forgive other than the sin of despairing of God's forgiveness and failing to seek it. (See the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) – [CCC 1864](#) & [CCC 2091](#)) However, that said we must make sure we do not simply presume that God will forgive us. Presumption of God's mercy is a sin in and of itself (see [CCC 2092](#)) and we must make sure that we do not allow ourselves to continue to sin assuming God will forgive us. We must always work to master ourselves and overcome our tendency to sin, not simply rely on God's forgiveness.

That said, swearing oaths is not to be taken lightly. [CCC 2150-2152](#) informs us that, "The second commandment forbids false oaths. Taking an oath or swearing is to take God as witness to what one affirms. It is to invoke the divine truthfulness as a pledge of one's own truthfulness...Rejection of false oaths is a duty toward God. As Creator and Lord, God is the norm of all truth. Human speech is either in accord with or in opposition to God who is Truth itself. When it is truthful and legitimate, an oath highlights the relationship of human speech with God's truth. A false oath calls on God to be witness to a lie....a person commits perjury when he makes a promise under oath with no intention of keeping it...Perjury is a grave lack of respect for the Lord of all speech." Therefore, one should avoid swearing oaths unless one is sure he/she is capable of living up to the commitment being made and intends to do so. Oaths made without this assurance are grave sins and one should seek absolution through sacramental confession to restore God's sanctifying grace in your soul.

Q: Are gay people accepted in the catholic church? I don't know much about it. Thank you - a gay person.

A: Let's get right to the answer to your question... You are a beloved daughter of God and that is what you will always be. There is nothing you can do to "undaughter" yourself as God will always welcome us home if we seek his forgiveness. God wants all his sons and daughters to come to his Church to receive the graces it offers through the Liturgy and Sacraments so that each of us can have the best possible chance of mastering love of God and neighbor that is the primary purpose of our lives here on earth. So yes... ALL PEOPLE are accepted and welcomed in the Catholic Church as its name implies. Catholic means "universal" – for all people and containing the fullness of God's revelation for humanity.

Because God made us in his image and likeness ([GEN 1:26](#)) we share in his two great attributes – intellect and will. God has these powers perfectly and we have them only as a shadow in comparison. That said, we are still able to use these attributes to understand ourselves, the world around us and God himself. We can then use that understanding to choose the good. Unfortunately, as broken humans, our passions can override our reason and we can forfeit our self-mastery for short term pleasure, even when our intellect informs us that what we are doing is irrational and a failure to choose the good.

When God created us, he had a plan for humanity in general and each of us individually. Part of that plan is living out our sexuality as God designed. Natural reason makes it clear to all humans that our reproductive systems were designed so that they require the union of one man and one woman to bring them to their natural end – procreation of offspring and the unity of the couple.

These systems are complementary, and work as designed in only one way. While we can achieve sexual pleasure by simulating acts that mimic sexual intercourse, our bodies only fulfill God's design when man and woman become one. ([MT 19:5](#)) God has revealed to us that any use of our sexual powers outside of a committed sacramental marriage between a man and woman is a grave sin as it is choosing our short-term pleasure in this finite life over God's plan for eternity to come.

All of God's children, regardless of their sexual orientation, are called to live lives of chastity that are suited to their state in life (See the [Catechism of the Catholic Church – CCC 2337-2350](#)). This means that any use of our sexual powers outside of sacramental marriage that is not open to life is equally grave (see [CCC 2351-2359](#) for an overview of grave violations against our call to chastity outside of marriage). As you can see acting on homosexual desires is just one of many such grave sins. (Note – the desire is not a sin, it is acting on that desire that is sinful.) The reality is most of us are attracted to one or more of these grave sexual sins and we need God's grace to help us achieve the self-mastery required to avoid them and live as God designed us. If we were to deny entry or expel everyone that suffered from attraction to sexual sin or a failure in this area our Churches would be empty.

We are a Church of sinners seeking God's grace to master true love of God and each other. True love requires that we seek only the eternal good of the other and be willing to sacrifice ourselves (and our disordered desires) to help each other realize that good. Unfortunately, as a Church of the broken, we have some who are not aware of the fullness of God's revelation in this area and they discriminate against those with same sex attraction as if that violation of chastity is somehow worse than the violations that heterosexuals can make. Please do not hold the misguided understanding and biases of some of its members against Christ or his Church. Christ's teaching on this matter is clear and unambiguous regarding those suffering from same sex attraction, "...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." ([CCC 2358](#))

So please know that you are not only welcome in the Catholic Church but that it was established to help you live out the life God planned for you. There is an apostolate in the Church that focuses on welcoming and helping those suffering from same sex attraction live out their lives in God's grace. It is called Courage ([couragerc.org](#)) and may be a great place for you to start to understand more about what I have outlined above. I encourage you (no pun intended) to respond to God's call that prompted your question. The Catholic Church is your home and as one of your brothers in Christ I want you there.

Q: Twelve years ago I fell in love with a man. I did not attend church 12 years ago. I have never been baptized. I was not raised in faith. We had an unplanned pregnancy 10 years ago. While we never had any intention to marry or live together, the pregnancy forced us to make a choice. We chose to support our child together as a family and we've lived since then in a relationship analogous to marriage. The choice was difficult for me as I did not believe that either choice was right. Either our son grew up without an intact family unit and suffered. Or I could live as if we were married and suffer personally as the best choice for our child. We attend mass together as a family and our son was baptized and confirmed last year. I want very much to share in this life of faith with our son. But I know that if I continue in a relationship outside of marriage that i'm not free to do so. I've asked my

partner to marry because I want to live a life of faith and he refused. I have told his parents in his company that I believe that living the way we do is a sin. I don't know what to do and I don't know if God will forgive me. I feel trapped. I love this man with my whole heart. I promised to him and to God that I would give this man my entire life. My partner has promised me his partnership for the rest of our lives. We worship God together but he won't marry, he says he does not believe in marriage. How can I receive Baptism? What are we to do?

A: I want to start by commending you for choosing life for your son and putting his needs for an intact family above all else. It is great that he has been baptized and confirmed and is able to continue his faith journey as a fully initiated member of Christ's Church – the Catholic Church. I am also happy to hear that your family participates in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass together as there is great grace in that. That said, I am sorry to hear that your partner is rejecting the great sacrament of marriage – a gift from God that Christ himself reinforced as a necessary step for those engaging in sexual intercourse (becoming one) -see [MT 19:5](#). I can sense the pain this has caused you through your email.

Unfortunately, the Church is unable to confer the Sacraments unless it has a reasonable expectation that one will be working to live their lives according to God's design. While we may (and likely will) fail in meeting that standard (as all of us sin), the Church must believe your intention is to avoid sin before it can confer God's grace through the sacraments. This means that you cannot be Baptized unless you and your partner are: 1) going to agree to live as brother and sister moving forward and abstain from all sexual relations or 2) pursue a sacramental marriage.

The fact that your partner worships with you is an encouraging sign as it shows at least some desire to conform his life to God's will. In addition, since you have been together for ten years already you have a clear indication that a commitment is in place. That said, a marriage means that one is giving himself/herself to another fully, with the intention of being faithful, an openness to fruitfulness (life), and a commitment to remaining married forever. Right now, your partner is demonstrating that he is not aligned with one or more of the "4 Fs" of marriage providing a poor example for your son and forcing you (and himself) to live in a state of perpetual mortal sin. Dying in that state would be placing your soul in jeopardy.

Since he does practice at least some elements of the faith I would suggest you ask him if he would at least be willing to speak to your pastor about his rejection of marriage as an institution. He should be able to explain his rationale for his rejection of the Sacrament and at least agree to listen to the Priest's explanation of why it is required and, more importantly, how it can strengthen the relationship you already have as a couple and family. Your partner may be surprised to find out how simple the process can be and what exactly it would mean for your eternal lives with God – for both you as a couple and your son. If he truly loves you and your son, he should be willing to at least have this conversation. Our priests have these discussions all the time and are very good at helping people recognize the truth and understand the value the Sacraments deliver.

Unfortunately, if your partner is not willing to budge on this you need to start considering what is best for the eternal lives of both you and your son. This would mean that you would need to separate from your partner so that you are no longer forced to live outside of a relationship with God and that a sound example can be provided for your son. This would be an extremely painful

path to pursue and should only be considered as a last option only after all other paths have been pursued. However, the consequence of not following this path if the times comes would be catastrophic for your eternal life and damaging for your son's.

I will pray that your partner will leverage his love for you and your son to at least speak to the Priest about his objections / concerns. If you can get your partner to take that step you may be surprised how he may find some healing of whatever it is that is preventing him from fully committing. It could be the first step towards seeing your marriage become a reality and your initiation into the church moving forward.

Q: How do we explain the apparent discrepancy in the Church's infallibility when it teaches something strictly in an earlier council and then claims to "re-formulate" in a later council. Here's my example: in the Council of Florence, in "Cantate Domino" the Church declares that "those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life... unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock." Then in Vatican II in "Lumen Gentium" it teaches that "the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator". Additionally, the Catechism says "all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body". I continued the quote from "Cantate Domino" (i.e. "unless before the end of life...") because I'd suppose that the argument could be made that "Lumen Gentium" is commenting and teaching further on what the Church means by these words. I'm afraid, however, that that argument would be faulty, or at least be a very weak argument, from anachronism (i.e. to say one thing and then later try to say that you meant something different by the words that you originally said, even if you originally put in a sort of short disclaimer.) It seems like mental gymnastics to make this argument. Am I on the right track? Otherwise, perhaps there would be a better way of explaining this development of doctrine.

A: Let's start with the understanding that for much of Church history it was clearly understood that those outside of Christ's Church could not be saved. This was not only the subject of the council of Florence but here is a list (not all inclusive) of other declarations that are aligned with it that came both before and after Florence leading into Vatican I and II:

- 1208 – Pope Innocent III
- 1215 – Fourth Lateran Council
- 1302 – Pope Boniface VIII – Unam Sanctum
- 1442 – *Council of Florence*
- 1564 – Pope Pius IV – Council of Trent – Iniunctum Nobis
- 1854 – Pope Pius IX – Singulari Quadam
- 1863 – Pope Pius IX – Quanto Conficiamur Moerore

In reading these documents and the writings of ecclesial writers over the course of time you will find that the position began to shift once it was discovered that the "Good News" had not reached everyone. You see, for a long time it was assumed that everyone in the world had been given the opportunity to learn that Christ was the savior, and his Church was the Catholic Church. Some of our greatest Saints and Church Fathers (e.g., St. Augustine) operated off this assumption and clearly declared that there was no salvation outside the Church.

It was during the medieval period when councils, Popes, and theologians began to realize that there were some problems with this interpretation of revelation. It was clear from Sacred Scripture that God willed salvation for all. It was during this period that this issue of infants that died before Baptism was analyzed and the Church recognized that no one is condemned to Hell who is not guilty of personal sin. By the high middle ages theologians like Saint Thomas were still putting forward the idea that there was no salvation outside the Church and its sacraments – particularly Baptism and the Eucharist – but Thomas did recognize that it is possible that someone could be invincibly ignorant and hence not culpable for their unbelief.

Following the council of Florence when the new world was discovered there was a recognition that there were huge populations of people in the world that had never been exposed to Christ and his Church. The condemnation of these people for existing outside the Church was not compatible with God's will for salvation for all. It was also at this point that it occurred to Church leaders that non-believers (Jews, Pagans, Muslims, Gentiles) may not actually believe in Church teaching even if they were exposed to it. Prior to this, most assumed that they believed but simply rejected Church authority and hence Christ. With greater ecumenical discussion it became apparent that this was not the case.

It was the Spanish Dominicans – Vitoria, Cano, and Soto – that moved this thinking forward in the 14th and 15th century by recognizing that unless a convincing argument has been made one could not be responsible for existing outside the Church. At the same time, it became obvious that an implicit faith lived by adhering to the natural law guided by the moral compass given to each of us by God could result in salvation as long as invincible ignorance about the one true Church and ordinary source of God's grace was in place.

The protestant revolution in the 16th century advanced the thinking even further. While it was clear that the original revolutionaries – Luther, Calvin and Zwingli – were heretics and had forfeited their salvation by abandoning Christ's Church, those that learned from them were not aware of the truth and hence could not be held accountable for being misled by those they trusted. It was Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) that first posited that salvation was possible outside the visible boundaries of the Church. At this point the thinking emerged that those that knew the truth were indeed going to be held accountable for receiving God's graces through the Liturgy and Sacraments of Christ's Church and were bound by the sacraments, but that God is not so bound. As a result, God is capable of distributing his grace in this world (which comes through his Church) in any means he likes. Suarez (1548-1619) and De Lugo (1583-1660) extended this thinking and while groups like the Jansenist rejected this line of thought Popes began to support it and reject the traditional line as not compatible with God's revelation of his salvific will.

The 18-20th centuries saw the extension of this line of thinking and near constant debate. However, by the early 20th century most Theologians and leaders of the Church had concluded that while the Church is the source of God's salvific grace on earth, it is both possible and likely, God will dispense that grace through the Church to all those who suffer from invincible ignorance and are capable of receiving it. This is the thinking that led into Vatican II.

The bottom line is that the doctrinal teaching that there is no salvation outside the Church remains in place. The Church is the source of God's salvific grace on earth and there is no other source. Those that come to know this truth are bound by the Sacraments as the ordinary means of receiving that grace. Meanwhile for those that are invincibly ignorant God can choose to offer them the

graces of Christ Church in other ways. This is a legitimate development of doctrine resulting from a deeper recognition of God's revelation and a more complete understanding of the world in which we live and the nature of the humans that inhabit it.

Q: How can Satan and the demons tempt us if they were thrown into Hell? Thanks!

A: Let's start with your premise that the fallen angels (that's what Satan and the demons are) were thrown into hell. That is a misconception that has no biblical basis. Our understanding of what happened with the Angels comes from the book of Revelation where it tell us, "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—**he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.**" ([REV 12:7-9](#)) So Satan and the other angels that rebelled were not thrown into hell but to earth.

We see the presence of Satan on earth throughout scripture starting in Genesis where we see Satan on earth tempting Eve ([GEN 3:1-7](#)) or Jesus himself ([MT 4:1-10](#)). We see multiple examples of Jesus exorcising demons in the New Testament for example when Jesus drove the demon out of the man with the unclean spirit in [MK 1:21-28](#). You can read more about the Fall of the angels in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in paragraphs [CCC 391-395](#). It is in that section of the Catechism that we read about the power the fallen angels have to "tempt us" when it says, "**The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite.** He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and **although his action may cause grave injuries—of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature—to each man and to society**, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history."

Q: What is the scripture argument for the Episcopal government?

A: This is a pretty easy one. Let's start with the basic understanding that Christ founded a visible Church and established Peter as its head. We see this laid out clearly in Matthew 16:17-19 where Jesus is referencing Isaiah 22 to make it clear that he is designating Peter his "Prime Minister" to govern his kingdom in his absence. This headship is confirmed in Luke 22 and John 21 where Jesus singles out Peter calling him to lead his sheep. We then see the remaining apostles (the predecessors to the bishops) given the same binding and loosing authority Jesus gave Peter in Matthew 18:18. This is the same passage in which you find Jesus' instructions for how to resolve disagreements within the Christian community (and no – the instruction is not to go form a new Church). Since only Peter is given the "keys," it is clear that the Apostles are empowered to lead the Church, but that Peter reigns supreme as the ultimate decision maker and unifying force in Christ's absence.

We can then move outside the Gospels to the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline letters to see the three-tiered hierarchy of Bishop, Priest and Deacon established and Apostolic succession put in place:

Apostolic Succession: Acts 1:12-26 (Judas replaced by Matthias indicating office of Apostle/Bishop will carry forward in time); 1 Cor 12:28-29, Eph 2:20, 4:11 (clear delineation of office of Apostle/Bishop)

Office of Bishop: 1 Tim 3:1-7 (office of Bishop defined and qualifications outlined); Tit 1:5 (Bishops ordain Priests)

Office of Priest and Deacons: Acts 6:1-6 (creation of office of Deacon and ordination – laying of hands); Acts 14:23 (Ordination of Priests – called Elders in every Church); 1 Tim 5:17-22 (requirements for Priest and Deacons and their ordination – laying of hands); 1 Tim 4:14 (ordination through laying of hands); Tit 1:5 (Bishops ordain Priests)

Finally, if we move outside Scripture (I know you wanted Biblical evidence but this extremely early type of historical record speaks to what the early Christian Church actually believed and practiced), we get evidence that this three-tiered hierarchy was firmly in place in the [letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Trallians](#) written in the first decade of the second century just 70-80 years after Christ's resurrection. In this letter Ignatius writes, "Let everyone revere the deacons as Jesus Christ, the bishop as the image of the Father, and the presbyters as the senate of God and the assembly of the apostles. For without them one cannot speak of the Church" (Ad Trall. 3,1) This passage highlights the three distinct roles within the ordained ministry: deacons, priests (presbyters), and bishops. In that same letter Ignatius also highlight the duty of Christians to observe the authority of the Bishops writing, "For, since you are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, you appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, in order, by believing in His death, you may escape from death. It is therefore necessary that, as you indeed do, so without the bishop you should do nothing, but should also be subject to the presbytery, as to the apostle of Jesus Christ, who is our hope, in whom, if we live, we shall [at last] be found." (Ad trall. 2,1)

We see continued reference to the three-tiered hierarchy and episcopal governance model throughout the first fifteen centuries of Christianity in a wide variety of extra Biblical writings – Church Fathers, Magisterial Documents (e.g., from Church Councils), Church records. This model was in place and unchallenged right up until the Protestant revolutionaries broke from the Catholic Church and needed to destroy the model to justify their schism. The lack of this type of governance contributed significantly to the never ending series of new Protestant denominations/Churches being formed as without a centralized structure and "buck stops here" decision making authority to only resolution to interpretive disagreement is to split.

Q: Re today's Gospel reading Mark 1 v14-20, I wondered why, John's Gospel (contrary to Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospel) implies that John the Baptist wasn't in prison when Jesus called his first disciples?

A: You should be aware that the Gospels were written for specific audiences (e.g., Matthew written for a primarily Jewish/Christian audience while Mark written for a primarily Gentil/Christian [Roman] audience). The Gospels were also written using literary conventions that were common to their culture and time period. As a result, except for Luke (who was attempting to write an "orderly account" – LK 1:3), we do not believe that the Gospels present a clear chronology of Jesus' life and ministry. For example, a significant majority of biblical scholars do not believe that the "Sermon on the Mount" (found in Matthew 5-7) was the

product of a single utterance. Rather, what we see in the “Sermon on the Mount” is an example of Matthew employing the common convention of the age and culture of gathering all the events that took place in a specific geography into one combined account. In this case it would be all of Jesus’ teachings from in and around Galilee being brought into one collection.

Grouping events by theme or geography was a common method of chronicling events in the first century. This is odd for modern readers who are used to writers of history presenting events in chronological order. As a result, it is difficult to put together an exacting chronology by studying a single Gospel account. A reliable chronology requires a detailed comparison of all four Gospels. Finally, it is commonly believed amongst biblical scholars that Mark was written first (perhaps simply as notes and not intended for publication) and that Matthew and Luke both draw upon Mark’s content. Hence, we see a great deal of overlap and concurrence (to the point of word for word copying) in the synoptics. This is one reason why you have the appearance of a common chronology across the three synoptic Gospels.

That said, while Matthew and Mark both present events in the same order - Jesus hearing about John’s arrest before his official calling of the first disciples - Luke makes it clear that this is not the case. Since Luke is the only one of the synoptic authors writing in the Greek historical style (chronological) and attempting to present an “orderly account” most biblical scholars would agree that the Disciples were called and Jesus’ ministry was underway before John the Baptist was arrested.

Let’s take a look at each Synoptic Gospel and lay out timelines:

Matthew (arrest before “the call”)

- MT 3:1-11 – We are introduced to John The Baptist and his ministry
- MT 3:13-17 – Jesus is baptized by John
- MT 4:12 – Jesus hears that John has been arrested
- MT 4:18-22 – Jesus “calls” his first Disciples
- NOTE: We hear the story of Jesus calling the Peter, Andrew, James on John in MT 4:18-22 but we know from the other Gospels that this was not the first meeting between Jesus and these men. John gives us a clear account that Andrew (and likely John) were followers of John the Baptist who began following Jesus and that John immediately introduced his brother Peter. We also know from Luke (the Gospel is that most likely chronological) that Jesus is in Peter’s house curing his mother-in-law before “the call” on the sea of Galilee. It would seem very likely that the Disciples were well acquainted with Jesus before what most perceive as “the call.” This makes the story of the call sensible as it was not a case of these fisherman simply responding to a call from an unknown preacher and means it is likely that the disciples started interacting with Jesus prior to John’s arrest.

Mark (arrest before “the call”)

- MK 1:1-8 – We are introduced to John The Baptist and his ministry
- MK 1:9-11 – Jesus is baptized by John
- MK 1:14 – Jesus hears that John has been arrested

- MK 1:16-20 – Jesus “calls” his first Disciples
- NOTE: See note above

Luke (arrest after “the call”)

- LK 1:5-25 – We hear of the events surrounding John the Baptist’s conception
- LK 1:57-66 – We hear of John the Baptist’s birth
- LK 3:1-18 – We are introduced to the adult John the Baptist and his ministry
- **LK 3:19-20 – We hear of Herod imprisoning John BUT this is clearly a reference to a future event as in the very next verse we begin to hear about the Baptism of Jesus by John who clearly was not in prison yet (LK 3:21-22).**
- LK 4:38-41 – Jesus is healing people, including Simon’s mother-in-law at Simon’s house
- LK 5:1-11 – Jesus “calls” his first Disciples
- NOTE: See note above

The bottom line is that it is Luke’s chronology that is most reliable as presenting an “orderly account” was his intent. The combination of Luke and John give us additional details about the introduction of the Disciples to Jesus that we do not get in Matthew and Mark that make sense out of “the call” of Peter, Andrew, John, and James that we see on the sea of Galilee and clarify the timing of the events surrounding that call.

Q: I have been pondering what might be some deeper questions., and this is one of them. First let me say that I accept Church teaching on Mortal sin, repentance and the authority of the Church to grant absolution through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As I understand it, God is the Creator of the Universe as we know it including space/time and all that we see and can perceive directly. He stands outside of space/time in Heaven, and has dominion over all. We live within creation, and live our lives in a linear fashion in a string of events from birth to death, and we all fall short and sin. Let’s say a given person is Catholic, is Baptized, and receives the sacraments, and has ups and downs in their life perhaps even falling away from the Faith at times but then repenting and coming back to try his/her best and is going to confession regularly. However this person struggles with sin - whatever it or they are, this person fails occasionally and knows it, and comes back to confession to seek God’s grace, forgiveness and help. Not that these sins happen every day but he/she falls into sin and then comes back - repeatedly. That’s the stage. Now, we know that death can come to any of us at any time. So given all of that, here’s my question... While God stands outside of space/time, viewing our lives as we’ve lived them within it, why would the person I described above’s eternal salvation be decided by the exact state in which he/she died in at the time of their death? If that person committed a mortal sin and then suddenly died, it seems that teaching would have them in danger of eternal damnation, while if the person had TIME to get to confession and receive absolution, they could be confident of salvation. Since God stands outside of time, why should we believe that His judgement is dependent on the timing of the person’s death?

A: You are not the first to ask it and you will not be the last. Let’s start with a basic premise that is outlined for us in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](https://www.catechism.org/) in which we read, “God had only one reason to reveal himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as his special possession: his sheer gratuitous love. And thanks to the prophets Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their

unfaithfulness and sins.” ([CCC 218](#)) Our God is not a ruthless judge sitting back waiting for us to fail to meet one of the rules. Our God is a good, good Father that has only our best eternal interest in mind.

As you point out “God stands outside of space/time, viewing our lives as we’ve lived them within it.” God knows what is on our hearts and minds. In your hypothetical above God would know that if the individual had the chance, he would have availed himself of the sacrament of reconciliation as he had always done. While we who are aware of Christ’s church and its teaching are beholden to the sacraments as the ordinary means of receiving God’s grace, God is not. God can choose to administer his grace to anyone he sees fit.

The Church has recognized the concept of confession by “desire” since the council of Trent. It is a logical extension of the long-held belief in Baptism by desire. God would not hold one accountable that would have sought his grace for not having the opportunity to do so formally through the sacrament. If you think about it, it makes perfect sense. Imagine a community that only sees its visiting priest once every few months or even only once a year (yes – this is a reality in many locales today). Do you really think God will hold those people accountable for not having recourse to the sacrament of confession if they die in between visits even though they would have availed themselves of it? I am sure you will come to the same conclusion as the Church – “Of course not.”

The bottom line is that receiving absolution through the course of a valid sacramental confession is the only way we can have assurance that we are in a state of grace. Therefore, we should always have the firm intent to seek the sacrament as soon as we become aware of the need for it. However, God is not beholden to the sacrament to offer us the grace he knows we would have sought when we die before having the opportunity to seek it. We just need to remember that we cannot presume on God’s mercy and use this as an excuse to delay seeking the sacrament.

Q: I don't understand how God can allow even his most faithful and obedient servants to suffer, in spite of their fervent pleas for divine intervention. I know: it's for a greater good. Still, I don't get it. I feel more merciful than God is, and I don't like feeling that way.

A: The problem of evil has been a challenge for those that believe in the one true God forever. The problem is addressed in what many consider to be the first book of the Bible ever written – Job – indicating just how important and difficult this issue is.

The classic question is, “How can an all good and powerful God allow the innocent to experience evil (pain and suffering)?” Many people come to one of three conclusions and determine that God is either:

- Not all good,
- Not all powerful, or
- He does not exist!

The Catechism expands on this basic question and offers some answers in [CCC 309-312](#). The bottom line answer is found in CCC 312 which states, “In time we can discover that **God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil**, even a moral evil,

caused by his creatures: 'It was not you,' said Joseph to his brothers, 'who sent me here, but God.... You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.' **From the greatest moral evil ever committed—the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men—God, by his grace that 'abounded all the more,' brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption.** But for all that, evil never becomes a good."

Even physical evils – earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, floods, disease, etc... - while bringing tremendous pain and suffering also bring great good. How many times have we all seen that when disaster hits people show up and help those they have never met. People donate their time, talent, and treasure to help others they do not know. The Evil provides an opportunity for humans to exercise virtue and demonstrate unconditional love of neighbor. Sometimes the scale of this is so massive that the good created clearly outweighs the evil even in our own finite view of events. St. Paul may have characterized this best when he wrote, "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." ([Romans 5:3-5](#))

In 1984, Pope Saint John Paul II, wrote a document entitled [Salvifici Doloris](#) that explores human suffering and offers an answer for its presence. This was a man that experienced a level of personal suffering (e.g., death of his family, persecution by the Nazis, assassination attempt, debilitating Parkinson's disease, etc...) that was much more than most, yet his view of suffering was one of love, humility, and transformation. If you want to get a good understanding of how God allows evil to create a greater good this apostolic letter may be the most thoughtful and beautiful response ever produced.

When Jesus came he did not come to put an end to all suffering in this life – he healed some but not all. He used his healing as signs of the forgiveness of sins and his own divinity. While God does not relish our suffering in this life, he is more concerned with this life giving us an opportunity to prepare for the next and become masters of unconditional love. Very often, it is suffering that helps us (and those around us who witness that suffering) do just that by making us humble enough to accept God's help or virtuous enough to express God's love to others.

The key is understanding that this life is just an apprenticeship for what is to come. As a result, in the grand scheme of things this life has very little to no lasting meaning beyond our ability to use it to learn how to love God and love others like he loves us. Sometimes, by taking away the challenges that this life presents, we can be making it more difficult for those we are trying to help become the "masters" (that is what an apprentice who graduates is called) we are called to be. In that case our desire to show mercy in the short term, which can sometimes appear to far outweigh God's own mercy, is actually doing a disservice to those we are trying to help.

Through 01/22/24

Q: On the trinity. Could THE SON be the physical of GOD, the HOLY SPIRIT the spiritual of GOD, and the FATHER be the mental of GOD? I ask this because THE SON has a body that was used to physically

interact with us, and the HOLY SPIRIT interacts with us spiritually. Furthermore in Mathew 24:36, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." does the fact that only the Father knows mean he is the mental aspect of God? I know some church fathers like Augustine suspected that The "Imago Dei" could be a reflection of God's trinity in us. Could our Physical, spiritual, and mental aspects reflect the trinity? Surely somebody has thought of this before and if I am completely wrong and onto nonsense I would really like to know. Thank you.

A: What you are proposing is something that some pretty smart people proposed in early centuries of Christianity. Unfortunately, this type of thinking is a form of a heresy that arose in the early centuries of the Church that was known under different names (it came in several varieties) – Modalism, Patripassionism, Sabellianism (You can read about all of the variations in the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#)). The common denominator across all of them is that the three persons of the trinity were viewed as part of the whole God as opposed to each one being completely and fully God as we believe. As Catholics, we believe that the three persons of the trinity are distinct divine persons, not one aspect of the single Godhead.

We see this in scripture as follows:

- 1) The Father is distinct: MT 6:9-13; JN 1:18, 3:16, 14:28, 15:26, 16:28; 1 COR 1:3, 15:24; 2 TIM 1:2; TIT 1:4; HEB 1:1-2; JD 1
- 2) The Son is distinct: JN 1:1,14,18, 10:29-30, 14:28; 1 COR 8:6; PHIL 2:6-11; COL 2:9-10; 1 TIM 1:17; 2 TIM 1:2; TIT 1:4; HEB 1:5-14; JD 1; REV 3:12,21
- 3) The Holy Spirit is distinct: JN 14:25-26, 15:26, 16:13-14; ACTS 5:3, 28:25-26; 2 COR 3:16-17; EPH 4:4,30

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) reviews the nature of the Trinity and three persons within it in [CCC 249-256](#).

You are in good company when you go down this path as it took centuries for the early Church to review all these possibilities and come to the conclusions it did in light of divine revelation. It is easy to take one of two passages of scripture and fall into a heresy by interpreting them in isolation. This is why when it comes to scriptural interpretation the Church defines three criteria that are to be applied in unison and are outlined in [CCC 111-114](#).

Q: What status does the Bible have in the church? I hear some groups treat it almost like an idol (though I haven't encountered that in my experience). How should we treat the Bible?

A: The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) states that, "The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body" ([CCC 103](#)) and "Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence." ([CCC 82](#)) Therefore, we are to treat the Word of God in both its forms – written (the Bible) and oral (Holy Tradition) - with the greatest reverence as they spring from the same source – God himself. That said, we don't worship the Bible as worship is due to God alone. An idol is something that is worshipped as if it is God. We venerate the Bible as it comes from God and it is his revelation given to us, but we do NOT worship the physical book that is the Bible.

Q: What is the name of the 14th century Catholic English Bible (the one before Wycliffe)? Are there other specific pre-reformers vernacular translations? What are they called?

A: This [ARTICLE](#) from the Catholic Encyclopedia provides a nice overview of the various vernacular versions of the Bible and when they first appeared. Click on the link at the top of the article for a history of English versions and within that section there is even a specific subsection of pre-Wycliffe versions.

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A: The problem of evil has been a challenge for those that believe in the one true God forever. The problem is addressed in what many consider to be the first book of the Bible ever written – Job – indicating just how important and difficult this issue is.

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A: You are not the first to ask it and you will not be the last. Let's start with a basic premise that is outlined for us in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in which we read, "God had only one reason to reveal himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as his special possession: his sheer gratuitous love. And thanks to the prophets Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their unfaithfulness and sins." ([CCC 218](#)) Our God is not a ruthless judge sitting back waiting for us to fail to meet one of the rules. Our God is a good, good Father that has only our best eternal interest in mind.

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Q: Can you confess and have your sins forgiven through prayer or must it be done through the priest?

A: For forgiveness of the guilt of mortal sins (acts involving grave matter, committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent) the ordinary means of forgiveness provided by Christ himself (see [John 20:19-23](#)) is sacramental confession to an ordained priest. Only by hearing the words of absolution from the priest are you sure that your grave sins have been forgiven. For less serious sins (venial sins) forgiveness can be obtained by participating in Mass and worthily receiving the Eucharist. While it is recommended that you confess venial sins during confession you are indeed freed from the guilt of venial sins through active participation in the Mass.

You can be forgiven of mortal sins by making an act of perfect contrition (sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed out of love for God, together with the resolution not to sin again – see [CCC 1451](#)) if it is accompanied by the resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as is possible (see [CCC 1452](#)). The bottom line is that sacramental confession is ultimately required for the remission of guilt due to mortal sin whether or not you are capable of making an act of perfect contrition.

Q: What is the Catholic moral stance on couples (who are not married yet) traveling together on a trip or vacation by themselves?

A: There is nothing wrong with couples travelling together prior to marriage. However, a concern would arise if during these travels you were putting yourself in the near occasion of sin. In other words, if you would be sharing a room and/or bed while travelling the concern would be that the temptation to engage in sexual intercourse outside of a valid marriage would be too great for you to resist. You want to avoid that type of temptation. Being alone together in a romantic destination may be too much for one or both of you to resist even if you had separate rooms, but only you can judge whether or not that is the case.

Another concern would be the creation of scandal. If others knew you were on this trip alone it could appear that you are putting yourselves in a sinful situation. This could serve to confuse others and/or signal to them that you believe such sinful behavior is OK. This could even lead others to commit the same sin you would appear to be committing by traveling together.

The bottom line is that the trip itself is not an issue. The possibility of placing yourself in the near occasion of sin and potentially creating scandal needs to be addressed. You can address both issues by making appropriate sleeping arrangements and making sure it is clear to all that, while travelling, you will be staying in separate rooms and remaining celibate. If you do this and are convinced that you can manage the temptation (a couple of big “ifs”) the trip itself would be a non-issue. Only you can judge whether or not you have the moral strength for this trip.

Through 01/15/24

Q: Who is Saint Valentine? Why is Valentine’s Day celebrated?

A: Great question. This [ARTICLE](#) from the Catholic Encyclopedia and give you some basics regarding both your questions. In addition, this [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers details many of the myths that have grown surrounding St. Valentine and/or the collection of people that may have been St. Valentine.

Q: Can you comment on who most likely wrote the Gospel of John, Revelation, and the 3 letters of John? Same person? And why do you conclude as such? John the beloved disciple, the elder, the evangelist, son of Zebedee? Can you please unpack all of these different Johns? Quite confusing.

A: I can understand how all the chatter on this topic can be confusing. Textual analysis has allowed us to get a great deal more clarity regarding the contents of Sacred Scripture. At the same time, it has opened up questions about authorship of certain biblical texts. The good news is that regardless of who the author of a specific book of the Bible was it remains the inspired Word of God as the Holy Spirit worked through that author to convey no more of less than what God required.

The consensus is that there are two Johns - John the son of Zebedee and John the Elder. John the Son of Zebedee was one of the twelve apostles, while John the Elder (who we know about from extra biblical sources) would have been a disciple of Christ during his ministry. John the Evangelist and John the Beloved Disciple would have been whichever of these John’s wrote the texts. It is possible that they both contributed with one writing the Gospel and one of the letters and another potentially writing the other two letters and the Book of Revelation.

All of the scholarly work to determine who wrote which books is non-definitive. The Church does not hold an official position on it, and you can make a case for one writer of all five books, a combination of the two writers or even completely different writers who may have been disciples of one or both of these Johns. Rather than kill you with detail in this email response I want to refer you to a couple of articles that appear on Catholic Answers that do a great job explaining the various cases: [ARTICLE 1](#); [ARTICLE 2](#); [ARTICLE 3](#).

I hope that helps. Please remember that while understanding authorship is important, that knowledge will always “take a back seat” to the fact that it is the inspired Word of God.

Q: Two questions: 1) Did Christ have any fears, wrt His human nature? Based on Scripture, capital T Tradition and Magisterial sources 2) Serious question: Is the satirical song "Jesus Christ is My N*gga" blasphemous/satirical? While I personally find the beat catchy, I have my concerns about the song as I find the lyrics extremely irreverent and problematic.

A: Let’s start with the second question first. [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, “**The second commandment prescribes respect for the Lord’s name.** Like the first commandment, it belongs to the virtue of religion and more particularly it governs our use of speech in sacred matters.” ([CCC 2142](#)) The Catechism goes on to tell us that, “Blasphemy is directly opposed to the second commandment. It consists in uttering against God—inwardly or outwardly—words of hatred, reproach, or defiance; in speaking ill of God; **in failing in respect toward him in one’s speech; in misusing God’s name.**” ([CCC 2148](#)) While the song’s lyrics may not have been intentionally written to disrespect the name of Jesus, for many hearing the words they can, and likely do just that. Therefore, your intuition is correct the lyrics are, “extremely irreverent and problematic” and should be avoided.

Now for your first question. Yes, Jesus did experience fear. In the Gospel of John, Jesus expresses his fear and anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, saying, "Now is my soul troubled" ([John 12:27](#)). We see this even more clearly in Luke when we read, “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.” ([Luke 22:44](#)) We see the same expression of sorrow, anxiety and anguish in [Mark 14:34-36](#) and [Matthew 26:38-39](#).

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus feels the weight of the trial and the bitter sorrow that awaits him, and he is troubled by the abyss of human sin and all that is unclean in humanity that he must carry with him. Jesus' fear and anguish in the face of his impending death reflect the full horror of humanity in the face of its own mortality and the burden of evil that touches our lives. Despite his fear, Jesus remains faithful to the will of the Father and accepts the duty to carry our sins in his body, becoming obedient unto death (See [Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) paragraph 121 and [CCC 612](#)).

In [Hebrews 4:15](#) we read, “For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning.” The inspired author is telling us that Jesus did indeed experience everything in his human nature that we experience with the exception of sin. Jesus' experience of fear demonstrates his full humanity and his willingness to embrace the suffering and sacrifice necessary for our salvation.

Q: In 2 Peter 3, Peter talks about the destruction of the Heaven and earth. Is he talking figuratively or literally. For example, he compares the coming destruction of the earth to the times of Noah, when the earth was cleansed with water. This new cleansing will be with fire. The earth was not truly destroyed, but the bad people who lived in it. So the "earth" refers to the people who live in it. What does the heavens refer to in 2 Peter 3 2 Peter 3 5-13?

A: One of the great features of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is its “Index of Citations.” It allows you to look up a scriptural verse, magisterial document, work of an ecclesial writer, etc... and see what official Church teach references that citation. In this case, you would be brought to CCC 1042-1050 which describes the “Hope of the New Heaven and the New Earth.” In that section we read, “The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed, ‘so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just,’ sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ...’We know neither the moment of the consummation of the earth and of man, nor the way in which the universe will be transformed. The form of this world, distorted by sin, is passing away, and we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, in which happiness will fill and surpass all the desires of peace arising in the hearts of men.” Therefore, we do expect a physical transformation of the entire universe and all physical places within it – including earth and heaven (heaven must have some place in material space and time as physical bodies – Jesus and Mary for sure – reside there).

Q: I recently read an article claiming 3 scientists won a Nobel prize for proving the universe isn’t “locally real” and I’m not sure how to understand that and if it has any effect on the existence of God. I have a bad habit of looking things up on the internet that scare me and I just keep seeing a bunch of things saying that reality is also an illusion and we aren’t real and other scary things and is there any backing to this and does this have any effect on the existence of God either? I am very worried and confused, I am constantly worried what if we are wrong and there’s no God, it is affecting my daily life and I’m not sure what to do anymore.

A: You are referring to the 2022 Nobel prize in Physics awarded to John Clauser, Alain Aspect and Anton Zeilinger “for experiments with entangled photons, establishing the violation of Bell inequalities and pioneering quantum information science.” This [ARTICLE](#) in Scientific American details it. Rest assured that their work does not prove that “reality is an illusion.”

What the work of the three scientists does demonstrate is what the pioneers of Quantum Physics have long espoused is true - that the matter we see all about us is not so much “fixed” as it is in constant movement and variation of state (I am simplifying it) and, as a result, is not as predictable (they use the term “real” to be mean fixed and known) as we believe. When we empirically measure matter, we are not getting a picture of that matter as it always is, but rather as it is at that moment. This is a challenge to the classical understanding of “fixed” reality but not reality itself as some might present it. What is around us is certainly real in the sense that it exists, but the state in which it exists is not clearly known to us. This relatively short YouTube [VIDEO](#) explains it pretty clearly. Listen to the end and you will get a nice summary. The video also does a fine job of providing the basics for the decades long debate in the world on Physics on this issue in a way that most could understand.

All that said whether the classical understanding of fixed reality or this new understanding of reality is true has no impact on the existence of God or Christianity. God created everything out of nothing and defined the laws of nature that governs that creation. He could have chosen to set up those laws any way he wanted. It could be a relatively fixed reality, a constantly changing reality, of a reality that only exists in the collective intellect of the members of it, etc.... None of that changes the truth that God created this world and everything in it, that he created Humans

in his image and likeness (with intellect and will – two intangible properties of a rational soul that is also intangible), and that we are his adopted sons and daughters destined to live with him eternally once this apprenticeship called life is complete.

Q: Since we just celebrated the Epiphany, I need some more understanding of the Three Wise Men. Were they kings? Were they scholars? Where did they come from? Did the Three Wise men meet with Herod and why? And if so, what did Herod want the Wise men to do? In Sunday mass with Fr. Chun in the reading they talked about “magi.”

A: Let start with the passage of the Bible that describes this visit. We only find it described in the Gospel of Matthew – Matthew 2:1-12. Here it is with key verses that pertain to your questions highlighted:

*“When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, **magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:***

And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.’

Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.’ After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.”

Now on to your questions:

1. *Three Wise Men. Were they kings? Were they scholars? Where did they come from?*
 - a. They were not Kings. Based upon what we find in non-biblical sources Magi was the name given to a Priestly cast that lived in Persia. They would have been amongst the most well-educated men of their population (hence magi can also mean “wise men”) – in ancient civilizations Priests were generally the most educated members of the citizenry. You can read more about them in the [ENTRY](#) from the Catholic Encyclopedia.
 - b. The National Catholic Register has a great article about modern day “Magi” that you can find [HERE](#).
2. *Did the Three Wise men meet with Herod and why? And if so, what did Herod want the Wise men to do?*

- a. First off you should be aware that the number of wise men / magi are not identified in Sacred Scripture. Matthew tells us that, “Magi from the East came to Jerusalem.” He does not actually tell us how many. We know it is more than one as plural pronouns are used, but it could be two or it could be fifty. We don’t really know. Tradition has led us to “assume” it was three most likely because three gifts were brought – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
 - b. The passage tells us that this group did indeed meet with Herod the Great (“Then Herod summoned the Magi secretly...”). Herod was the figurehead King of the Hebrew people that the Roman empire put in place. The Roman empire often put a “King” in place that was a “native” of the population (Herod was loosely connected to Jewish people) to help appease that population and make them easier to govern. The actual governance was still executed through the Roman leadership.
 - c. Herod’s “reign” is well documented in history, and he was a ruthless king who would do anything to remain in power. He actually killed two of his sons out of fear that they were trying to usurp his power. As a result, it is no surprise that when these wise men / magi show up proclaiming that a new King of Israel has been born (“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”) that Herod would want to speak with them. Herod would clearly be disturbed that they wise men / magi believed a new King was born as that would be a direct threat to his power – a new King means he would no longer be King.
 - d. We also see Herod calling his own “wise men” together to figure out what had been predicted for the future King of Israel and indeed the prophet Micah (Micah 5:2) had predicted that an everlasting King /Messiah of the Jewish people would indeed be born in Bethlehem (“And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.”)
 - e. Herod stated that he wanted the wise men to, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” It is clear that what Herod really wanted was for the wise men to identify where this child could be located so that Herod could kill him before he had a chance to become the King and put an end to Herod’s reign. We know this because the God was clearly aware of Herod’s intent as he, “...warned (the Magi) in a dream not to return to Herod...” and give the child’s location to Herod.
3. *In Sunday mass with Fr. Chun in the reading they talked about “magi”....*
- a. Magi is the term that would be used for these Priests from Persia. Magi can be interpreted as “wise men” and in the translation of the Bible we use in Church when proclaiming Sacred Scripture (NAB) the formal name – Magi – is used.

Through 01/08/24

Q: What is the “proof” of purgatory in the Bible? I do not understand purgatory. It is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible, however I am not sure if it is slightly tinted at; I have been trying to further my understanding of Catholic faith, so this will help greatly. Thank you and God Bless you

A: This is a doctrine that has been well flushed out and established in the Church since the early centuries. That said, the Catholic Church is not limited to Sacred Scripture in establishing its doctrines. The Catholic Church is a Church of the Word of God in both its forms – written (Sacred Scripture) and oral (Holy Tradition – Jesus’s teaching passed on to the Apostles but not written down). As Saint Paul writes to the Church in Thessalonica, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” (2 TH 2:15)

That said, it is very easy to make a case for Purgatory using Sacred Scripture alone:

Step 1: Scripture teaches us that nothing impure will enter heaven – See REV 21:27; MT 5:48; HEB 12:14

Step 2: Scripture teaches us that there will be purification required for those that are not perfect – See 1 COR 3:15; MT 5:26 (no one is released from Hell); JAM 3:2 (we all fall short)

Step 3: Scripture teaches us that we should pray for the dead. If they are in heaven there is no reason to pray for them. If they are in hell our prayers are of no value as hell is permanent. Therefore, there must be a third state that the dead can experience where our prayers can provide some value and help move on heaven – we call this purgatory – See 2 MACC 12:44-46; 2 TIM 1:16-18

If you want anymore this [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers should provide you with a nice overview as it references everything above and adds some color.

Q: The instructor in last night’s RCIA class mentioned that women cannot be priests or bishops or deacons. He told us women can only be nuns or sisters. Why then do we have “Mother” Teresa? It sounds like she was and is a priestess. Do we recognize Deaconesses? Do they go through training with their husbands becoming Deacons?

A: The instructor was absolutely correct in saying that ordained Priesthood is limited to men only. This was declared to be an infallible doctrine of the Church in his Apostolic Letter entitled *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* in 1994. It is a short read and you can find it [HERE](#) if you want to check it out. The reasons laid out in this document have been in place since the founding of the Church 2,000 years ago and have not changed. They include: 1) The clearly recorded history of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; 2) the constant practice of the Church for 2,000 years, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and 3) 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. The bottom line is that the Church does not have the authority to do anything that was not taught or demonstrated by Christ and his Apostles.

“Mother Superior” is a title given to the head of a female religious order. It is often shortened to “Mother”. Mother Teresa was both the founder of the Missionaries of Charity and the Mother Superior of their order. She was not a priestess, and she did not in any way serve as a Priest. A Priest is someone who offers sacrifice – always has been and always will be. Catholic Priests offer the sacrifice of Jesus himself to the Father at each and every Mass.

There were women who served as Deaconesses in the early Church. We read about one, Phoebe, in Paul’s Letter to the Romans ([Romans 16:1](#)). However, all historical research done on early Deaconesses has revealed the same things: 1) They were not ordained as Deacons were, and 2) Their primary roles was one of preserving modesty for women being Baptized (you would disrobe to Baptize in the early Church and hence women baptized women). There have been several commissions of historians and theologians that have studied the role of Deacons over the years. There is currently one that is active that was ordered by Pope Francis as the issue of women being ordained to the Diaconate continues to be raised and Church wants to make sure it has not missed anything that would indicate that bringing women into the ordained Diaconate is possible.

In many Dioceses today the wives of men that pursue the permanent Diaconate do indeed go through much of the training that their husbands go through. This is done, so that wives can better support their husbands in this role and to ensure that they are fully committed to supporting their husbands. If the wife (and children if there are any) is not fully on board, a Diocese will not enroll a man in their Diaconate program.

Q: I have a question of doing the deed and how it can affect with my relationship with God. I know that if you do it before marriage is a moral sin and separates us from God Spiritually. But if you have a person you trust and you only plan on doing it once with them. And then staying loyal till you meet the person you’re marrying. Will that still affect my relationship with God? I would also like to know if you’re dating someone and you do the deed before marriage and marrying that person, creating a family in the end, is still a sin? Or will that sin be forgiven? If I ever did it once will I ever be forgiven or never? How would God feel?

A: The simple answer is that any use of your sexual powers outside of a valid marital bond in a way that is not open to creation of life is a violation of God’s design for human sexuality. The Catechism spends a great deal of time elaborating on this as it is such an important topic (see [CCC 2331-2391](#); ~15 pages). It is not about being loyal; it is about recognizing that the sexual act is designed to be an act of total self-giving in which both parties hold nothing back. When we engage in sexual relations with someone to whom we are not willing to commit, we are holding something back. It is no longer an act of total self-giving, but it is the use of another to derive short term sexual pleasure. It is an objectification of the other – they simply become a means to an end, a “quick fix”.

That said, there is no sin that God cannot forgive except the sins we do not seek forgiveness for. If we truly seek forgiveness with the intention to use the graces that God gives us (e.g. through the Sacraments) to avoid sin in the future, we are forgiven every single time. This is a demonstration of true contrition and, when done within the context of a sacramental confession, all of our mortal sins are forgiven. There is nothing you can do to unson or

undaughter yourself from God except to choose to abandon all hope of forgiveness and obstinately persist in sin.

Remember that we all suffer from concupiscence – the desire to sin. Each of us is attracted to different forms of sin and mastering our passions to avoid sin can be a significant challenge. Without the grace of God offered to us freely through the liturgy and sacraments, we would have to try to “white knuckle” it and would likely fail miserably. The good news is God gave us the Eucharist to heal, strengthen, transform, and unify us and confession to return to him if we fail. Confession is like a new Baptism – we are once again reborn with Christ.

The fact that you are asking the question means God is already working in your life to help you master your desires. Work with him and you might find yourself surprised about what you are capable of doing. You might not succeed at first. Don't let that get you down. God is fully aware of the challenges his commands present to our passions. He is on your side and will always remain there. Reach for him and he will help you.

Q: Can you tell me what time of the year the Bread of Life Discourse took place?

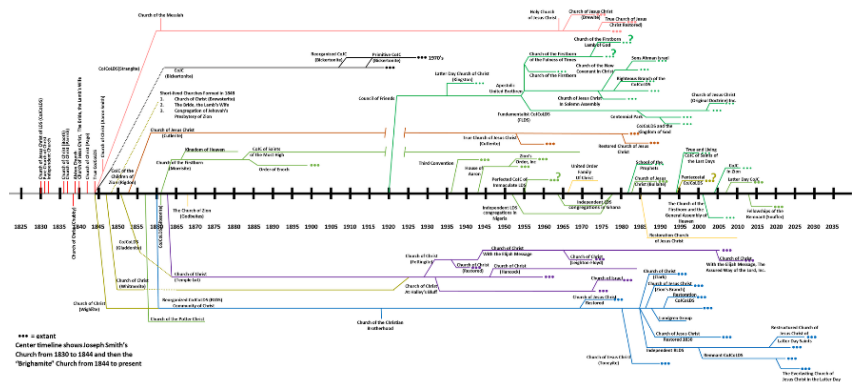
A: While it is often difficult to place precise timing on the various events of Jesus' ministry this is one that we are given a specific piece of information that allows us to place it clearly in very tight range within the calendar year. In [John 6:4](#) we are told, “Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” This is the second of three Passover celebrations identified in John's Gospel. This statement immediately precedes the feeding of the 5,000 ([John 6:5-15](#)) in the afternoon, Jesus walking on water ([John 6:16-21](#)) that evening and the Bread of Life discourse the next morning in Capernaum ([John 6:22-59](#)).

The Passover or Pasch is celebrated starting on the 15th day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar and lasts for 7 or 8 days, usually in April. It celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and their exodus from Egypt. The Jewish calendar is tied to the lunar cycle so the 15th day of Nisan can vary from year to year – falling between March 26 and April 25 of the Gregorian calendar.

Q: I was talking to a mormon today and surprisingly he said that neither the bible nor the book of mormon is the inspired, inerrant word of God. He said that he knows what's right and wrong in both books because he is being guided by the holy spirit. He also said that it can't be inspired because it would go against the free will of the authors. So my question is how do I address his claims and how do we know the bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God? Also who wrote Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and how do we know?

A: Let's start with this gentleman's assertion that, “he knows what's right and wrong in both books because he is being guided by the holy spirit.” This is a common Mormon claim that many Protestant Christians will also make. It is important to note that Mormons are not Christians (this will impact how effective the arguments below are with him relative to Christ's support for the inerrant nature of Scripture). Mormons do not believe in the Triune God as Christians do and they do not believe Jesus is one of the 3 persons in the Triune Godhead. This [ARTICLE](#) from Catholic Answers does a great job of highlighting what Mormons actually believe and before engaging further you may want to make sure you are up to speed with basic Mormon beliefs.

The idea that individuals are capable of accurately interpreting scripture (or in this case determine what is and is not inspired) because the Holy Spirit guides them has been proven wrong by the historical record. If this was true, we would expect that the Holy Spirit would guide everyone to the same truth. Yet, we live in a world that has an untold number of Christian interpretations of scripture that has resulted in the formation of an immense number of Christian ecclesial communities. Most of the communities were formed because of leaders disagreeing on doctrinal issues as a result of varied scriptural interpretation. The disagreement occurs and then the community splits. The Mormons have seen this in their own history with the various splinter groups that come from the Mormon tradition - Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), Centennial Park Group (The Work), Apostolic United Brethren (AUB or Allred Group), and Latter Day Church of Christ (Kingston Clan), etc... The diagram above shows the development of the numerous Mormon splinter groups all claiming their version of the truth is guided by the Holy Spirit.



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Jesus does make a promise that, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” ([John 16:13](#)) Jesus makes this promise to his Apostles during the Last Supper. Jesus had previously given the Apostles the power to “bind and loose” (establish, interpret, and enforce laws, decided who was part of or excluded from the community, etc...) in [Matthew 16:19](#) and [Matthew 18:18](#) when he was creating the organizational and governance structure for his Church. In making this promise to his Apostles (not everyone else) he was assuring them that the Holy Spirit would prevent them from making an error when it comes to the teachings of his Church – faith and morals. We have seen this promise realized for the last 2,000 years as the Catholic Church has remained true to Christ’s teachings from the beginning. Christ created the Church to serve as the authentic interpreter of his Word. Unfortunately, men have ignored that and determined they knew better than Christ and his Church.

As for his claim that Sacred Scripture cannot be the inspired Word of God, “because it would go against the free will of the authors,” I would respond that your Mormon friend seems to have a misunderstanding of what inspired means in this context. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) informs us that, “God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. ‘To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, **made full use of their own faculties and powers** so that, though he acted in them and by them, **it was as true authors** that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.’” ([CCC 106](#)) (Paragraphs CCC 101-133 provides a solid overview regarding the Catholic Church’s view of Sacred Scripture, its inspiration and the proper means of interpreting it.) The authors wrote of their own accord as true authors using the skills and understanding they had while being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

To put the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in perspective I offer this analogy. Let's say you are writing a doctrinal thesis, and I am your advisor. I am going to influence your work and help you keep it aligned with the original intent, but the writing remains yours and, despite that influence, at no point am I infringing on your free will. The Holy Spirit did not dictate Sacred Scripture to the inspired writers. He ensured their work was complete and included everything necessary to convey the message God was transmitting through them, but they were free to choose to write, apply their own writing style and determine what message they wanted to highlight. While my analogy is certainly not the best (all analogies fail to varying degrees) I hope that it helps you with your Mormon friend.

As for, "...how do we know the bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God" I would like to offer one simple argument that Christians will accept, but your Mormon friend may struggle with as a result of his understanding who Christ is. We believe that Jesus is God and hence incapable of error. The fact is that, "Jesus overturned many common religious ideas of his day, but he didn't challenge the authority of scripture. As the incarnate Word of God, he (Jesus) acknowledged the authority of the written word. Thus he declared, 'Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished' ([Matthew 5:17](#)) and 'scripture cannot be broken' ([John 10:35](#))" (Akin, Jimmy; *The Bible is a Catholic Book*; El Cajon, CA; Catholic Answers Press; 2019; pg. 65) In other words, since Jesus accepted the authority of Scripture that is the best possible endorsement one could offer. For a less satisfying yet more to the point reason to believe in the inerrant nature of Sacred Scripture we can turn to Scripture itself where Saint Paul writes, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#))

Moving on to your final question... "Who wrote Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and how do we know?", let's begin with some basics. While the Gospel writers do not name themselves in the Gospels, this does not mean they were not known to their original audience and those individuals that were paying for the Gospels to be written as in the case of Theophilus with Luke's Gospel (see [Luke 1:3](#)). At the same time, we see in John's Gospel that the author is telling us it was written by the "Beloved Disciple" (see [John 21:20-24](#)) whose name would have been known to his intended audience. So, at least for those two Gospels we have a strong reason to believe the names attributed to them were correct as we would have seen an outcry if they were not. One question that does remain relative to John's Gospel is whether the Disciple being referred to is John the brother of James and son of Zebedee or John the Elder who is mentioned in early post apostolic writings. There is quite a bit of scholarly debate on this relative not to just the Gospel of John but the three letters of John and the book of Revelation as well.

As for the other two Gospels – Matthew and Mark – while we have thousands of early copies of manuscripts there are none that identify these Gospels with other names. As a matter of fact, all four Gospels are known only by the name given to them in early Christian literature which is strong support that the authors were clearly known and there was no doubt about the authorship of these works.

Another reason for asserting that these were indeed the authors is that, "the names themselves provide evidence of their authenticity. While ancient writers sometimes attributed their works to long-dead authors to increase the prestige of their works that wouldn't have applied to the

Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke weren't the people you'd pick to add prestige" (IBID; pg. 97) As a matter of fact, not only weren't Mark and Luke Apostles but Mark is presented in a less than flattering light in the Acts of the Apostles, while Luke was not even a companion of one of the twelve (as Mark was of Peter). Meanwhile, Matthew was a Tax Collector – someone loathed by the Jews of the age. His name would be the last one you would attribute the Gospel of Matthew to as it was written for a Jewish audience.

From a Historical perspective it is criteria like those identified above, that lead experts in the analysis of ancient Literature to validate the names associated with the Gospels. There is no evidence that any other writers could claim authorship in terms of manuscript copies with different names on them, there are some indications within at least two of the Gospels that the named authors were indeed the authors, and the names attributed to three of the four Gospels would have been poor choices unless they were indeed the actual authors.

Q: Several philosophical topics relate closely to the faith. You likely know them better than I do. They would include topics such as free will (e.g., Libertarianism), mind-body problem, consciousness... Is there a book exploring key philosophical questions related to the faith? Family members are debating these topics (one who is an atheist who likes philosophy), and I have so far been doing web searches and youtube searches... having something "all in one place" that does a good job of presenting the issues and diving into them from a Catholic perspective would be very helpful. I am open to books, videos, websites, key people who cover the topics, etc. Thank you!

A: You are absolutely right. There is a very close relationship between philosophy and theology. Philosophy can be considered a preamble to theology as it enables one to refine concepts such as God, soul, substance, person, nature, justice, evil, etc... One of the greatest philosophers of the "modern" age happens to also be one of its greatest theologians - Saint Thomas Aquinas. Thomas', *The Summa Theologica* is a massive treaty (usually presented in several volumes, >1,000,000 words) on the faith that leverages philosophical principles to dig into nearly every area of Christianity from a Catholic perspective. You can find a more condensed version of this in Thomas' *Summa Contra Gentiles* which was written specifically for non-Christians. There is also Thomas' attempt at a condensed versions of the Summa in, Aquinas', *Shorter Summa: Saint Thomas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica*.

The good news for you is that you can find the Summa Theologica online [HERE](#). I would suggest you dig around a bit here to see if this is what you are looking for. If Thomas is a little too much to start off with you might want to try Peter Kreeft's book, *Philosophy: What Every Catholic Should Know*. At the very least the Kreeft book would be a good introduction into core principles of philosophy that bear on Catholicism.

Q: I have a question regarding Holy Days of Obligation. On Solemnities like Mary the Mother of God, when it falls on a Saturday or Monday, I know the precept to attend Mass is abrogated, but what about the rest we are supposed to take on Holy Days of Obligation? Like is it just like a Sunday but without Mass or is it more like taking a weekday off of work and you can chill, do chores, go shopping, etc?

A: Let's start by clarifying a misconception. When Holy Days of obligation fall on a Saturday or Monday the requirement to participate in Mass is **NOT automatically abrogated**. We observe 6 Holy Days of Obligation in the United States:

1. *January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*
2. Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter, the solemnity of the Ascension
3. August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
4. *November 1, the solemnity of All Saints*
5. December 8, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
6. December 25, the solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Per [THIS DECISION](#) of the U.S. Bishop's Conference in 1991, "Whenever January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, or August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption, or November 1, the solemnity of All Saints, falls on a Saturday or on a Monday, the precept to attend Mass is abrogated. For all other days the decision to abrogate the obligation or not rests with the Bishops. For example, December 25th fell on a Monday this year and it remained a Holy Day of obligation. This meant that we needed to participate in Sunday Mass for the 4th Sunday in Advent on December 24th (Sunday) or the evening of December 23rd (Vigil Mass) and then participate in the Christmas Mass either on Christmas day (Monday, December 25th) or Sunday evening, December 24th (the Christmas Vigil Mass) to fulfill our obligations.

As to your question the [Code of Canon Law](#) answers it directly in [Canon 1247](#) when it says, "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass. Moreover, they are to abstain from those works and affairs which hinder the worship to be rendered to God, the joy proper to the Lord's day, or the suitable relaxation of mind and body." So...the simple answer is, "Yes." We must treat Holy Days of obligation like we would treat Sunday by doing such things as refraining from unnecessary work.

Q: I know you're going to think this is weird, but while meditating after receiving communion on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, it hit me that if Jesus came from our Blessed Mother's body, when we receive the Eucharist are we in a small way also receiving the body of Mary? I think the answer is no, but why not?

A: I don't think it's weird. I can understand why you would ask it. Let's start with some basics about what we believe regarding the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic bread and wine...

When we eat Christ's Body and Blood in the Eucharist we are not eating his human flesh and blood but the substance of his glorified body. You can read about this in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) in [CCC 1374-1376](#) which tells us:

"The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique...In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained...This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present...The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was

truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.”

With that said let's think about your question a bit. You seem to be making the connection that since Jesus's body came from Mary's body at birth that his body would have elements of hers in it. While Jesus's body would include the contribution of Mary's DNA to his DNA makeup, and that DNA would have used the nourishment that came from Mary's womb to construct the cells that would eventually form Christ's infant body; that does not mean that parts of Mary's body became Jesus' body. Mary contributed the "code" that was used to construct Jesus' body, and the supplies necessary to complete that construction, but her body would have remained genetically distinct and separate from Jesus's through the 9 months in the womb.

You could go to the extreme level and say that it was Mary's egg that was fertilized by the Holy Spirit in some mystical way to form Jesus' first living cell and from that cell all others reproduced. However, even at that extreme level those early cells all died and were replaced many times over the course of Jesus' earthly life. Even though the common axiom that all of your body's cells are replaced every seven years is untrue (see [THIS ARTICLE](#)) there would have been no elements of Mary's physical body remaining in the adult Jesus based upon what we know about biological science today.

However, even if that were not the case and we were able to say that elements of Mary's body were in Jesus's physical body when he was an adult, we do not consume Jesus's physical body in the Eucharist as stated above. Therefore, even if were possible that cells from Mary's body remained in Jesus' adult body it would not mean that we were receiving the body of Mary when we received the Eucharist.

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 20th 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 21st 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 20th 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://couragerc.org/>) is a Catholic apostolate that supports those with same sex attraction and EnCourage (<https://couragerc.org/encourage/>) is an 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.