

Write three facts about yourself on a slip of paper. Place them in a pile with all the others. As your leader reads each one, guess who the fact belongs to.



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Jesus invites you to the Church.
- The RCIA is a time to ask questions.
- The RCIA process has four periods.



Feelings can be powerful, but you wouldn't want a relationship founded only on feelings. Relationships are stronger and healthier when they're built on solid ground. We trust and respect decisions that are well-considered, shared, and entered into freely.

- How do you make big decisions?
- Why are you interested in learning more about the Catholic Church?



Welcome to the RCIA

There are many people searching for a way to meet their spiritual needs and identify with a community of faith. People who feel the desire to know more about the Catholic Church and to explore its life may simply need a friendly invitation. Perhaps your spouse or a close friend is Catholic, or you saw or read something that prompted questions and inspired interest. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the Church's way of extending an invitation.

Take Your Time

No need to rush; it makes sense to go at your own pace and move thoughtfully through the biggest decisions of our lives. People rarely get married, buy a house, change careers, or move cities without giving such significant decisions appropriate time and consideration. Our initial interest leads to further exploration, helping us get to know our options and ourselves better. You might have felt this tug at your soul before and have only now chosen to act upon it.

Our Catholic faith isn't so much a set of beliefs, although we do have them, but more of a relationship that starts with our Lord and develops as we observe and encounter him in our lives.

What Does the RCIA Mean?

The RCIA stands for the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**. It's the process through which unbaptized adults and older children are formed in the teachings and practices of Catholicism and are *initiated* into the Catholic Church. It's marked by various **rites** or rituals, which usually occur at Sunday Mass. Sometimes the process includes baptized adult Christians or Catholics who are preparing to receive the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist.

Why Do Catholics Initiate Others Into Their Faith?

Jesus told his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). No other ancient religion sought converts: not Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans. But Christians—not just Catholics—still welcome and invite anyone to join us.

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This is because we believe that:

- Following Jesus makes people happier and more at peace, both here and in the life to come. We believe the Catholic Church has the fullest and most authentic understanding of Jesus.
- The Christian community is strengthened by the conversion of all people, who are created in God's likeness and called to discipleship.

"I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

John 10:10

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

John 15:11

Jesus Says, "Come!"

Jesus doesn't just want us to follow him into the faith blindly. He wants us to make the choice freely and with all the information we need to make a decision.

- "Come, and you will see" (John 1:39). Jesus invites people to observe him to see if he accomplishes what he says. You will study Jesus closely in the RCIA.
- "Come after me" (Matthew 4:19). These are some of the first words Jesus spoke during his ministry. He didn't say, "Understand me" or, "Obey me." He allowed people to consider his ways and to freely make up their minds.
- "Come, follow me" (Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). "Follow me" is perhaps the simplest definition of our faith. The RCIA is like a winding road: hard to see far down, but revealed as you go. Fortunately, Jesus leads the way.

What Happens in the RCIA?

Most processes are a series of weekly sessions with a team of **catechists** (religion teachers), sponsors, and fellow participants. Each session is a safe place to discuss the faith and explore questions about Catholicism or religion and spirituality in general. All questions are welcome and honored.

God invited Mary to be the mother of Jesus because Jesus couldn't be born without her free and informed consent. Before giving her consent, Mary asked "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34). Like Mary, we all have free will to accept Jesus into our lives and to ask our questions. That's how much God respects—and even expects—your honest questions.

Is the RCIA New?

This process began in the earliest years of the Church. In those first centuries, it was a challenge to convert to Christianity because the Roman Empire often persecuted those who didn't follow its pagan religion. The Church wanted to make sure that candidates really knew what they were doing and were willing to stand up for their faith in a hostile environment. In the 1960s, the Church called for a return to this early model in order to provide Christian formation in the same gradual way people experience and enter any lasting and loving relationship.

- What questions do you have today?



How Long Does the RCIA Last?

It depends. People come with their own unique stories and needs. While many classes begin in late summer or early fall and end at Pentecost, some schedules will vary or run year-round, allowing you to proceed at your own pace.

Understanding faith is as important as having faith, and that takes time. Come with an open heart and an open mind. Get to know as much as you can. Each week, you'll be invited to reflect on Christ's words and deeds and witness or even practice some Catholic behaviors to see if you feel called to this life.

The Periods of the RCIA

1. **Inquiry** (*Evangelization and Precatechumenate*): During this period, anyone can test the waters and ask questions about the Catholic faith. No commitments or promises are made. This period can last as long as you desire—a few months up to a few years.
2. **Catechumenate**: This word comes from ancient Greek, the language of the early Church. Catechumen means "a person receiving instruction." During this period, you will study and discuss most of the Church's main beliefs. You will also have a **godparent** or **sponsor** join you on your journey. This person can be a Catholic family member, a wise and good friend, or someone from the parish suggested by the team. Your sponsor should attend the RCIA sessions with you regularly and continue conversations with you outside the RCIA. They also serve as your representative and advocate to the Church.
3. **Purification and Enlightenment** (*Lent*): This period occurs during the weeks before Easter and may include any of several optional rites. This time is more prayerful than instructional. It is a time of deeper spiritual preparation for the sacraments. Then, on the night before Easter, during the Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday, those who have completed their preparation enter the Church through the **sacraments of initiation**: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.
4. **Mystagogy** (*Postbaptismal Catechesis*): This final period usually lasts several weeks—from Easter to Pentecost. It's a time to reflect on the mysteries of the sacraments and to begin living out your new faith in practical ways.

Why Should I Attend Mass and Participate in Parish Events?

The Church celebrates the Mass because Jesus invites us to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). In worship, prayer, and holy Communion, Catholics are united with God and each other. That togetherness also reveals the Lord: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

While we can—and should—pray and study alone, God wants us to experience his love as part of a community. Faith is both private and public, and—as in any loving relationship—God doesn't want you to walk alone or keep your feelings to yourself. Publicly expressing and receiving love together makes it stronger, more real, and inspires others. So when the parish sees and hears your journey—and you witness members' ongoing and growing faith—you strengthen each other along the way.

- Name a Catholic you admire. What do you admire about him or her?



How Do I Start?

- **Be openhearted**: Come eager to learn.
- **Ask questions**: Be ready to address and explore your concerns.
- **Talk to wise mentors**: Let your understanding grow as you discuss ideas with trusted friends.
- **Pray for wisdom**: Ask Jesus for what you need to follow him.
- **Read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC)**: A **catechism** is a summary of religious teachings for the purpose of instruction. Consider this a great asset for your journey.
- **Keep a journal**: Let it be a place to record and respond to questions or comments and to reflect on your journey and growth in writing and prayer.

How Can We Nurture Our Faith?

Reading

Reading the Bible and spiritual writings of the saints or contemporary authors helps us resist temptations and inclinations to selfishness. Spiritual reading introduces us to the wisdom of others who have traveled the way of faith.

Lifestyle

Those with faith grow in God's love and share it with others. When done with faith and hope, spreading the good news of Jesus, practicing good works, and avoiding what's harmful become joys, not burdens.

"What good is it...if someone says he has faith but does not have works?...If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

James 2:14–17

- What does your lifestyle say about what you believe?

Prayer

Spending time together is vital to all relationships. We grow in relationship with Jesus through speaking and listening to him in prayer.

"Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive."

Matthew 21:22

Community Participation

The individual Christian is but one part of the body of Christ, the Church. We need to be open to the gifts God extends to us through his community. We both receive support from its wisdom and abilities and also contribute to its overall unity and strength.

Sharing your faith journey with the RCIA team, your godparent or sponsor, the parish, and the entire Church will help you experience the gift of community and build the support network we all need.

Write down any questions you have about faith, religion, and the Catholic Church. Sometime this week, approach an experienced Catholic, an RCIA team member, or a parishioner—perhaps a potential sponsor—for help in answering those questions. If a question can't be answered immediately or completely, schedule another discussion or ask for contacts and resources that may help.

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Journey of Faith

In Short:

- Faith is freely given by God.
- Faith, science, and reason coexist.
- Faith grows when we nurture and share it.

What Is Faith?

"Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen."

Hebrews 11:1

Faith often refers to religious belief, but we can have faith in many things. Faith begins as trust, an essential element in any healthy relationship. As young children, we believed our parents, caregivers, and teachers would provide for our needs and safety. We later extended our faith and trust to friends, classmates, romantic interests, and God.

For Catholics, the most important faith is in God as revealed through Jesus Christ. As we grow in relationship with Jesus, nurture our faith and trust in him, and come to believe in his message, our lives have greater purpose and richness. Faith is our free response to God's loving invitation.

"By faith, we are able to give our minds and hearts to God, to trust in his will, and to follow the direction he gives us."

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 37

- Who or what do you have faith in?

What Does Faith Feel Like?

Spiritual longing is part of human nature (CCC 44). Saint Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions* 1.1).

This longing manifests itself differently in each person. For many, it arises as the search for meaning. As we ask fundamental questions—*Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?*—we may be drawn into deeper reflection and tap into an inner longing for God. These questions challenge our minds, but the mind's answers are insufficient—just as, we discover, are worldly pursuits of personal fulfillment or self-improvement. We are drawn to something more.

This longing for "something more" is the beginning of our response to God's call to relationship—*friendship*—with him. Recall St. Augustine's words: "You have made us for yourself." In other words, it's built into our nature to return to God, our Creator, and to respond to his love with our lives. The *Catechism* tells us, "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God" (CCC 27).

Does this mean the way of faith is easy? That we won't ever struggle or feel far from God? Closeness to God can't be measured in terms of feelings. God is as near to us when we struggle as when we're full of peace and joy.

Faith in God is a lens through which we see all of life. We find strength in our faith in difficult times,

and the joys of life are more meaningful when we recognize them as God's blessings.

"Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of [your] faith, the salvation of your souls."

1 Peter 1:8–9

Does Having Faith Mean We Don't Question or Doubt?

Asking questions is one way we learn about the world and each other. God places questions within our hearts and minds to draw us closer to him and to his will. God also gives us perception, reason, and conscience to guide us to truth. Faith seeks understanding.

True faith isn't anti-intellectual; it makes full use of the sciences, history, logic, imagination, and emotions. The Catholic Church is so grounded in essential truth that it will support and assist you in exploring your questions. You may not always understand or like the answers, but the Church believes Christ is present in you and your journey.

"The believer does not seek to understand, that he may believe, but he believes that he may understand."

St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium*, chapter 1

Called to Faith

"Now Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains."

Acts 9:1–2

For some, the gift of faith comes in surprising ways. One day, a man named Saul was making a journey to the town of Damascus. All of a sudden he was blinded by a flash of light and heard a voice from heaven. "He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'" (Acts 9:4). He went from someone who persecuted Christians to a follower of Jesus Christ himself and a great teacher, spreading the story of Jesus throughout his part of the world. God even changed Saul's name to Paul as a sign of his new identity as a follower of Jesus (Acts 9:1–19).

The Bible and Faith

The Catholic understanding of faith comes largely from Scripture. The essential message of the many biblical references to faith is that it is a gift freely given by God. Christ walks with everyone who opens his or her heart to him:

"Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:26

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God."

Ephesians 2:8

"Jesus said... 'Everything is possible to one who has faith.' Then the boy's father cried out, 'I do believe, help my unbelief!'"

Mark 9:23–24

- How is participation in RCIA a sign of your growing faith?
- In what ways is your faith a gift? Give an example.



What Is Faith in Action?

For most of us, our faith beginning isn't dramatic. God is like a quiet gardener who knows where the "good soil" lies within us better than we do. God plants the first small seed. But if we want our faith to grow, we have to be active about it.

Once you ask God for the gift of faith, God gives it to you freely. But we can't just ask God to give us the gift of faith and be done with it. We have to nurture the faith he gives us. We can't expect our faith in God to grow if we do nothing. Acting on faith takes practice and courage. We witness faith in action in the lives of others—and in our own choices and behaviors:

- Choosing selfless acts over personal interests
- Acting with good intentions and giving others the benefit of the doubt
- Reaching out to strangers or those with poor reputations
- Engaging in dialogue and civil discourse to determine the greater good and best solutions

Catholics claim these acts as reflections of Jesus. Jesus often said to those he healed or forgave, "Your faith has saved you." In every case, their faith was both internally felt and shown in their actions:

Luke 7:37–47

The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears

Matthew 8:6–8; Luke 7:2–7

The centurion who told Jesus his servant would be healed at Jesus' word

Matthew 9:20–21; Mark 5:25–28

The woman who touched Jesus' cloak

"Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Matthew 17:20

As noted earlier, relying on faith can be active even in the midst of challenges. Everyone goes through times of confusion, doubt, and fear. We may fail to meet expectations or find ourselves trying to control too much. In these moments, we can lean on our faith rather than slip into discouragement or despair.

Use these steps to pray your concerns to God:

1. Quiet yourself, trusting in God's loving care. Christ patiently stands at the door of your spirit and knocks, ready to enter and remain with you (Revelation 3:20).
2. Take your problem or dilemma to God in prayer: "God, I give _____ to you completely. Help me let go of this obstacle and trust in you."
3. Ask God to help you recognize your part, whether it was good or bad, and to conform your will to his. If a solution is presented, ask God for the strength to cooperate with it.
4. Thank God for his goodness and return to your day ready to accept whatever happens.

- What can you hand over to God this week?
- What are your hopes and fears about this situation?
- What might it mean to let God manage this situation for you?



Using the Bible passages below, find names, roles, or characteristics for each person of the Trinity.

God the Father

Matthew 19:4 _____

Romans 8:15 _____

2 Corinthians 1:3 _____

God the Son

Matthew 1:23 _____

John 1:14 _____

John 10:11 _____

God the Spirit

Matthew 3:16 _____

John 15:26 _____

Acts 2:1–4 _____

Praying to the Trinity

Through prayer to each divine person, we enter into an experience of the Trinity that overcomes our limited ability to grasp this mystery.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola offers an easy yet powerful method of prayer that can help us grow in our relationship with the Trinity. He encourages us to end each time of prayer or meditation with a conversation in which we speak to each divine person in short, spontaneous, heartfelt phrases, much like a friend speaking to a friend:

1. First, speak to the Father whatever is on your heart, expressing your gratitude, sharing your needs and worries.
2. Then speak to Jesus in the same way.
3. Finally, speak to the Spirit, asking for help and guidance.

In your journal, write three short prayers using the prompts below:

Dear Heavenly Father...

Dear Jesus, my Lord and Savior...

Come, Holy Spirit, help me...

Try to begin and end each day this week with a short prayer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Journey of Faith

In Short:

- The Trinity is three persons in one God.
- The Trinity is revealed in Scripture.
- We can relate to each person of God.

The Holy Trinity

"The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet they are not three but one God."

Athanasian Creed

Catholics often begin prayers with the sign of the cross and the words: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." By doing so, we express our faith in three divine persons collectively called the Holy or Blessed **Trinity**. This simple yet meaningful prayer connects us to a mystery at the heart of Christian life and belief. In fact, "the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life" (CCC 234).

The Church calls it a **mystery** because three persons in one God is difficult to comprehend. It's not a mystery in the sense some genius or advancement in science will someday solve it. It's a mystery in the religious sense, a deep truth or reality beyond anything we can experience or understand in this world. The heart of the mystery of the Holy Trinity is that "God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange" (CCC 221).

This mystery is like "love" or "grace." As much as God reveals to us, as vivid as our experiences are, we know there's always something more.

We're called to loving communion with others because we are created in God's image. It's often through human relationships that we experience God's love.

- What relationships have helped you experience God's love?

The Trinity in the Bible

Belief in the Trinity has been part of the Christian understanding of God from the beginnings of the Church. Saint Paul wrote in the year 57: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Corinthians 13:13). That greeting recognizes three persons in God.

This mystery of God's life and identity was revealed in Scripture gradually:

1. The Father revealed himself to ancient Israel. In a world that worshiped many gods, he taught the Israelites that he is the one God who created the world. The Old Testament hints at the Trinity. God created the world by his "word" and "breath" (Psalm 33:6). The Word (Son) of God and his life-giving breath (Spirit) are active throughout the Old Testament.
2. Next came the Son, revealed in the Incarnation: "In the beginning was the

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Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son" (John 1:1, 14). We celebrate the **Incarnation**: God's coming to dwell with us on earth as the Son (Jesus) in human flesh, at Christmas.

When used to refer to Jesus, "the title 'Son of God' signifies the *unique and eternal* relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father" (CCC 454, emphasis added). This means that in the very life of God, there is a Father-Son relationship: God "is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father in relation to his only Son" (CCC 240). The Father and Son are so close, they share one divine nature.

3. Finally, the Holy Spirit was sent and revealed. At Jesus' baptism, there is a manifestation of each person of the Trinity: the Son is baptized, the Father speaks, and the Spirit descends like a dove:

"Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him....After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"

Matthew 3:13, 16–17

As his death was approaching, Jesus began to speak of the promised Spirit he will send after his resurrection (John 14:16–17, 26). Jesus' words are fulfilled when the Spirit is poured out on the Church on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after his resurrection on Easter. On that day, the Spirit is "manifested, given, and communicated as a divine person....On that

day, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed" (CCC 731–732). Sharing in the one divine nature, the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son (CCC 245).

In the history of salvation, the three persons of the Trinity are revealed in order: Father, Son, and Spirit. In our own spiritual histories, we also come to know each divine person but not always in that order. Some may come to know Jesus first and only later develop a relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

- Which person of the Trinity feels most approachable to you right now? Why? Which person do you look forward to getting to know more about?



Speaking of God: A Vocabulary of Faith

A good way to learn what Catholics believe is to look at the words of our prayers. The Nicene Creed, an important statement of our beliefs, spells out our belief in the three persons in one God:

- It begins by saying that we "believe in one God"—one being, one consciousness, one will, one mind, a single, infinite, all-powerful, divine reality. The Church uses terms such as "substance," "essence," and "nature" to describe this oneness (CCC 252–253). God's goodness and power is shared in three persons. Each **person** is complete and distinct from the others yet wholly and eternally God.

- "The Father almighty" is "maker of heaven and earth." We see the Father as the Creator and cause of everything.
- Jesus is "the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages." This means that the Son *always* was. Both Father and Son have existed from the beginning and have been in the closest of relationships: "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30).
- The Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The Spirit issues from them both—together and eternally, *not after* in time or in order.

The words "begotten" and "proceeds" both convey energy, movement, and power, in the context of unity, equality, and love. Seeing a dynamic relationship among equals is key to understanding the Trinity.

An Image of the Trinity

Any attempt to visualize the Trinity is going to be limited and imperfect because God is more than we can fully understand. However, the shield of the Trinity, though imperfect, may help.

The points of the triangle represent *who* God is: the three persons. The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Father; and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son (CCC 254).

Father, Son, and Spirit are one in what they are but distinct in who they are.



The Work of the Trinity

"Inseparable in what they are, the divine persons are also inseparable in what they do."

CCC 267

Each person of the Trinity works in common with the others in every divine action. All the saving work of God proceeds from the Father, through the Son, toward completion in the Spirit. The goal of the Trinity in creation and history is to unite human beings with the love of the triune God (CCC 260). We receive this call to share in a life of divine love "by the grace of Baptism 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'" (CCC 265). Saint Paul beautifully expresses this experience of grace:

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...to ransom [us]...so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"

Galatians 4:4–6

The Miracles of Jesus

Miracle: An event that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered the work of a divine agent.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus cures the sick and injured, commands nature, multiplies food, and even raises the dead. He didn't perform miracles to demonstrate his power, gain authority, or impress anyone. He performed most of them away from the crowds and in the presence of only a few. He frequently told witnesses not to tell anyone what they had seen. Rather, his miracles seem to have two purposes:

1. To serve as signs of his divinity and mission, that God's kingdom has arrived, and that God's love is present and at work (see John 10:24–39 and 14:11).
2. To affirm and strengthen those who already have faith (see Matthew 15:21–28 and Luke 8:40–56).

Read the Gospel passages below, then discuss whether each miracle serves as a sign of Jesus' divinity and mission, an affirmation of faith, or both:

- Wedding at Cana (water into wine; John 2:1–11)
- Cleansing of a leper (Matthew 8:1–4)
- Healing the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1–10)
- Healing Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage (Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56)
- Loaves and fish, feeding 5,000 (Matthew 14:13–21)
- Walking on water (Mark 6:45–52)



Write a letter to Jesus. Talk to him as you would to a friend or your spouse.

What would you like to share with Jesus this week?

What difficulties or joys would you discuss with him?

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Christ is the way to the Father and salvation.
- Jesus is fully human and fully divine.
- You can have a personal relationship with Jesus.



"Moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

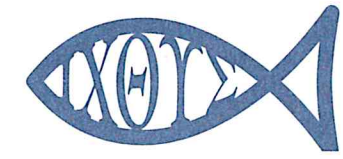
CCC 424

"To confess that Jesus is Lord is distinctive of Christian faith."

CCC 202

Who Is Jesus Christ?

What do you see in the image at right? Early Christians used the fish symbol as a secret code indicating they were followers of Jesus. Sometimes the fish's eye was a tiny cross. You also see the Greek acronym **ichthys**. Each letter (*iota, chi, theta, upsilon, sigma*) begins the words in the title "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." When early Christians saw the fish or ichthys, they knew immediately they had met another Christian and were safe from persecution. They belonged to each other and to the Lord.



While the Catholic faith uses many symbols to illustrate deeper truths, our faith is founded in the living person of Jesus Christ. Jesus binds us to God and to each other. Christ alone gives meaning to our faith, and every belief and practice points to him, interrelating with the others to make up a complete and full expression of the truth.

Jesus' True Identity

Jesus' earthly existence is undeniable; historical research has established the approximate date and place of his birth, as well as the circumstances surrounding his crucifixion. Those around him felt certain of his origins, calling him "the carpenter, the son of Mary" and "the Nazarene" (Mark 6:3; 14:67; see also Matthew 13:55).

The real question, then, lies in whether Jesus is God—whether his miracles, teachings, death, and resurrection have real and lasting meaning for all humanity. Even in his own time and region, many were skeptical. The Jews were awaiting the Messiah, but they expected a mighty warrior. They never imagined their savior would have such humble beginnings. When Jesus asked his apostles, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27), answers varied. Peter replied, "the Messiah." Jesus didn't deny this identification but "warned them not to tell anyone" (8:29–30).

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Messiah: In Hebrew, "anointed" (Greek, *christos*). The one foretold by prophets who would deliver God's people from their enemies, sin, and evil and establish a kingdom of justice and salvation. Similar to savior, this term originally had a clear political sense but later was revealed to have deeper, more supernatural implications.

"Know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Acts 2:36

- If Jesus is God and Savior, what does that mean for your life?



Only Jesus can reveal the secret of his person. If we are to understand him, we must let Jesus speak for himself.

How did Jesus describe himself?

- John 4:25–26 John 6:48
- John 8:12 John 10:14–15
- John 11:25–27 John 15:1
- John 17:1–3

- Which of the verses from John's Gospel has the most meaning for you? Why?



Jesus Is the Way

"I am the way and the truth and the life."

John 14:6

Jesus' identity and role can be difficult to understand and accept, yet over thousands of years, billions of people around the globe have called themselves followers of Christ. Many have changed or lost their lives because of it.

It's important to realize that Jesus was a faithful Jew. The Jews possessed a deep knowledge of God. Drawing on this background, Jesus shared many sayings that were taught by the prophets and Jewish rabbis. For example, Jesus taught that we should pray in secret (Matthew 6:6). A Jewish saying shares a similar message: "He who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron."

What made Jesus unique, then, isn't his teaching. Jesus is unique because *he is the Son of God*. He not only called people to hear and heed his message, but also to believe in him! That was completely new; prophets and teachers had never before demanded belief in themselves. They wanted to kill him, we're told, because he "called God his own Father, making himself equal to God" (John 5:18).

Jesus placed himself above the Jewish religious leaders and practices. He claimed to be the way to God and the complete fulfillment of Jewish teachings and prophecies. He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17; see also Luke 24:44).

- To what or where do Jesus' life and teachings lead you?
- How has he guided your life so far?



Jesus Is the Truth

"For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth."

John 18:37

Jesus says, "I am the truth," not "I speak the truth" or "I reveal the truth," but "I am the truth." As son of Mary and Son of God, Jesus' human and divine natures cannot be separated. Unlike religious leaders and saints throughout history, he is never "off duty" or subject to sin and flaws. Every word, every action, every gesture, every emotion is full of meaning and truth. Jesus invites us to have a personal relationship with him—and in him and through him, a relationship with the Father.

"To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek him the greatest adventure; to find him, the greatest human achievement."

St. Augustine

Jesus came to show us God in human terms—to make the Father present to all.

How does Jesus describe his relationship with the Father in John's Gospel?

- John 1:18 John 5:37–38
- John 6:46 John 8:38

- What would it mean for you to have a personal relationship with Jesus? Does this seem more appealing or uncomfortable? Why?



Jesus Is the Life

The greatest treasure we have is life itself. Our earthly life is fragile, limited, and temporary, but Christ offers us a full and everlasting life. For many, it takes a close encounter with our own limits or mortality to seek the life Christ offers and true salvation.

How does Jesus show himself to be the life in the following Scripture passages:

- Matthew 16:25 Mark 8:35
- John 1:3–4 John 5:21, 24
- John 6:53 John 10:10

John 17:1–2

This life includes being filled with the Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of life" (Nicene Creed). Jesus promised to send the Spirit. When he came upon the apostles at Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection at Easter, they were filled with new life—the life of the risen Christ.

"I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

Galatians 2:20

Jesus continues to promise his life and Spirit to anyone who wishes to be united to him. Having a personal relationship with Christ, which includes prayer and the sacraments, is how disciples embrace the Trinity and prepare for life after death.

Shouldn't We Take the Bible Literally?

Some Bible passages are to be read literally. When we read that Jesus is the Messiah, those words should be taken literally. When Jesus says to eat his body and drink his blood, he is not speaking metaphorically (John 6:53–57). When we read about Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, we realize these were real events.

This doesn't mean every passage contains literal facts—only that each portion of the Bible conveys something real and important—a truth—about God or the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), a document from the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), states that “the books of scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred scriptures” (11). In other words, the Bible is **inerrant**—incapable of being wrong—especially when it comes to salvation, faith, and morals. The Bible isn't to be read as a science or history book. It's a religious book with religious meaning.

Catholic teaching evolves and expands to address new situations and guides us in our interpretations and reflections on biblical texts. This makes it possible to accept scientific theories and historical conclusions without fear of contradicting God's word. When we read the Bible or hear it proclaimed at Mass, we can receive the message as God's will for our lives and communication from the one who loves each of us.

Choose and read a passage from the Bible, perhaps the Gospel for the coming Sunday.

What message of comfort, hope, or challenge do you find there?



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The Bible has a unique nature, history, and structure.
- Scripture is the sacred and inspired word of God.
- Catholics consider context when reading and interpreting Scripture.



- What might you have risked smuggling in if you were in Avram's situation? Why?
- Why might the Gospel of John been so precious to Avram and Wurmbrand?



What Is the Bible?

The **Bible** (“little books” in Greek) is a collection of writings—a library—about God, his relationship with humankind, and how he wants us to relate to him and each other. As a whole, it serves as a record of **salvation history**: the Father's saving plan and works as recounted through time, people, and events, beginning with Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis and ending in the new heaven and earth and fulfillment of God's kingdom in the Book of Revelation.

The Bible

In his book, *In God's Underground*, Richard Wurmbrand tells of his imprisonment in Romania for his religious views. One day, the guards brought in a new prisoner named Avram. Avram was badly injured and in an upper-body cast. After the guards left, his hand disappeared beneath the cast and emerged with a small, tattered book:

“Avram lay there quietly turning the pages, until he became conscious of the eager eyes fixed on him. ‘Your book,’ I said. ‘What is it? Where did you get it?’ Avram closed the book. ‘It’s the Gospel according to John,’ he said.” He had managed to conceal it under his cast at the time of his arrest. Avram held out the book. Wurmbrand says, “I took the little book in my hands as if it were a live bird. No life-saving drug could have been more precious to me....”

Who Wrote the Bible?

Many Bible stories and records were passed by word of mouth through oral tradition long before anyone wrote them down. These stories, also called Scriptures, were all written for different reasons but have the common purpose to try to share the story of God's relationship with his people. Eventually, people recognized a need to write them down. The books of the Bible were written at various times between 900 BC and AD 100.

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The authors came from different backgrounds and wrote in a variety of languages and styles. Catholics believe and teach that each book was **divinely inspired**. This means we believe the Holy Spirit guided the authors' work to ensure they expressed the message, the truth, that God wanted shared. Saying that God is the author of the Bible doesn't mean God dictated the Bible word for word.

How Is the Old Testament Organized?

The Old Testament books trace the relationship between the Israelites and the one God and Creator who acts in human history, guiding it with plan and purpose.

The Pentateuch ("five books" in Greek) is the first five books of the Bible and also is known as the **Torah** ("Law" in Hebrew, specifically the Law of Moses). It tells of the Israelites' journey as God's Chosen People through Abraham's path to Canaan and the exodus from slavery in Egypt.

The Historical Books cover the period from the Israelites' entry into the Promised Land around 1225 bc to the end of the Maccabean wars around 135 bc. Their view of world events sees God's guiding hand in everything.

The Wisdom Books are an artistic yet instructional search into the meaning of life. The authors use poetry, proverbs, sayings, and songs to face problems and questions of our origin and destiny, suffering, good and evil, right and wrong.

The Prophetic Books are the words of those who speak for God about important situations concerning God's Chosen People. Central to the prophets are themes of repentance and expectation of the Messiah.

How Is the New Testament Organized?

For years after his resurrection, missionaries spread the news about Jesus by word of mouth. Eventually, Christians decided to preserve their heritage in writing.

Most of the New Testament books were written by the end of the first century. The writings don't tell who Jesus was but who he is. Each book reveals a unique aspect of Jesus, guides the Church and Christian living, and has the power to change lives today.

The Gospels—Gospel means "good news." The four Gospels were written for different communities, but all record the words and deeds of Jesus, tell the story of his passion and death, and explain what they mean in light of his resurrection.

- The Gospel of Matthew focuses on Jesus' teachings.
- The Gospel of Mark tells about the public ministry and humanity of Jesus.
- The Gospel of Luke reveals Jesus' concern for the poor and women.
- The Gospel of John leads us into the mystery of Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is an account of how the early Church lived and grew.

The Pauline Epistles consist of thirteen letters from St. Paul to local churches and the Letter to the Hebrews.

The Catholic Letters are seven letters by other apostles to the universal Church.

The Book of Revelation is a message of hope for persecuted Christians, promising Christ's ultimate triumph—not a prediction of the future.

Two Testaments, Two Covenants

The word **testament** means "agreement" or "covenant." The concept of **covenant** is central to the Bible. The Old Covenant was established between God and our Jewish ancestors, beginning with Abraham. The New Covenant was established by and in Jesus Christ. The New Covenant fulfills and is a continuation of the Old. It extends God's law and salvation to Gentiles (non-Jews).

You have practiced looking up Bible verses in earlier lessons. Your Bible's table of contents will help you determine each book's respective testament and, likely, page number. The Old Testament comes first because its events occurred earlier. It is three times the size of the New Testament because it covers more books and more time. While the New Testament covers less than 100 years, it is far more important to Christians than the Old Testament.

Locate the passages below. First find the book, then the chapter, and finally the verses. What are some features and promises of the two covenants?

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| Exodus 19:3–8 | Jeremiah 31:31–34 |
| Luke 22:19–20 | Hebrews 8:7–12 |

Where Did the Bible Come From?

By the middle of the first century AD, Christians had adopted the forty-six Old Testament books in the Greek translation. In the sixteenth century, Protestants adopted only the thirty-nine books in the Hebrew translation. In the year 393, bishops drew up the list of books in the New Testament. It included twenty-seven books that were widely used and accepted as inspired throughout the first centuries of Christianity. To be considered inspired, a book's content also had to be consistent with the message of Jesus as passed on by eyewitnesses.

Faced with alternate versions emerging out of the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545–63) declared the list to be the **canon** (authentic and established collection) of sacred **Scripture** (in Latin, "writings"). This official declaration assured the faithful that the Catholic Scriptures were, indeed, sacred.

- The canon of Scripture is a major part of the Church's legacy. What possessions or traditions are part of your family's heritage?



How Do Catholics Read and Interpret Scripture?

The Bible's main purpose and intent is to impart the story of our relationship with God, not to detail historical events (although we do read about events in salvation history).

When we focus only on the words themselves (literal or surface reading), we can lose the deeper meaning behind those words. As you read passages from your Bible, ask yourself:

- What is the meaning and context of this passage?
- In what style or genre was it written?
- What historical or cultural influences are reflected here?
- What was the author's purpose or intent, given that he or she was inspired by the Holy Spirit?

Guided Meditation

1. Find a quiet, distraction-free space.
2. Relax your body and calm your mind. Close your eyes.
3. Reflect on your faith journey. Think of the events that have brought you to this point of growth in relationship with God and his Church. Think of the people who have shown you love and forgiveness.
4. Ask the Lord to reveal his loving plan of salvation for you. Though it won't happen all at once, be open to receiving the faith, hope, and strength to journey on.
5. Reflect on how your desire for God can be realized today.
6. When you're ready, open your eyes.

- Who or what has revealed God's love, mercy, and presence to you?
- How have you responded to that revelation?
- How has God used you to reveal himself to others?



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- God reveals himself to us and to the world.
- God reveals himself through many means.
- God wants us to know him fully and clearly.



Divine Revelation

Think back to when you started a special friendship. As your relationship developed, you revealed more of yourself—thoughts and feelings, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams. Over time, your friend came to have a pretty good sense of *who you are*. Yet as close as you may be, no other person can claim to understand you completely. We continue to discover and reveal new aspects of ourselves as we move through life.

We can apply some of these same relationship principles to how God reveals himself to us. Remember that God is a loving communion of persons—three divine persons in one God. God is loving relationship and provides a model for how we, who are created in his image, are to live—in relationship with God and the community of his Church.

Our Universal Desire for God

Throughout time, people have longed for and sought union with God. This drive to know God is reflected in various writings from our tradition:

- “My soul longs for you, O God” (Psalm 42:2).
- “Our hearts are restless till they find rest in You” (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1).
- “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God” (CCC 27).
- Blaise Pascal—mathematician, physicist, and theologian—wrote of a God-shaped hole in the heart of every person that can only be filled by God as made known through Jesus Christ.

- Which of the above best fits your experience of seeking and being sought by God?



Creation and Human Experience

We can find God in his creation of the universe. In seascapes and star fields, in woodland hikes, in animals, and in the deep emotions we feel for other people, we find evidence of an all-knowing, all-loving Creator.

As “wonderfully made” human persons, we also find God through our human nature and experience (Psalm 139:14). We have a soul and are designed to seek truth, beauty, and happiness. In creating us, God grants us freedom, consciences, and the use of reason to guide us. The more we become aware of ourselves and our relationship to God, the more convinced we’ll be that God is present and offers us wholeness and real satisfaction.

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"Ever since the creation of the world, [God's] invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made."

Romans 1:20

- Where do you experience God—in the rhythms of nature, a loving friend, the wonders of space?



Divine Revelation in Scripture

God didn't just create the world and leave us to our own devices (CCC 50). Our Creator communicates his love and will to us, for us. This is important, because there are moral and religious truths that reason and intelligence alone cannot fully grasp.

Divine revelation is God's making himself and his saving plan known to us. Just as we reveal our hearts to a friend, God shares his will with us and invites us to friendship.

God reveals himself and his plan *within history and to people*. From Adam, Eve, and Noah to St. Paul and the early Church, sacred Scripture contains the inspired and inerrant witness to God's presence, actions, and saving works.

Jesus is the full revelation of God, the Word of God made flesh who "made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Jesus is the historical and human "face of God" and mediator between God and all humankind.

In fact, "all the Scriptures—the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—are fulfilled in Christ" (CCC 2763, see Luke 24:44). This revelation was present in a veiled way in the Old Testament but made explicit in the New Testament (CCC 65–67). In the fullness of time, God's plan is revealed through Christ's

ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and Second Coming. Through Jesus, all can encounter God and be saved.

"In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins."

1 John 4:9–10

"[God] wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth."

1 Timothy 2:4

- Has the Spirit ever presented a Bible passage to you at a timely moment? Does a certain verse or figure resonate with you? If so, write it down and display it in a prominent place so you can revisit it often, perhaps even memorize it.

- What difference does it make that God became one of us in Jesus?



Divine Revelation in Sacred Tradition

As Jesus' life on earth was coming to an end, he instructed his apostles to continue his mission of sharing the good news of God's love and the promise of eternal life. He sent them the Holy Spirit to be their helper and guide. With the Spirit's assistance, the apostles witnessed to, preached, and wrote about the revelation of God, rooted in Jesus' words and actions. They made sure the gospel was handed on intact.

The Spirit also guided and assisted the apostles in choosing successors and handing on to them "what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit" (CCC 83). So, beginning with Jesus, the line of authentic, Spirit-filled transmission of divine revelation continues through the apostles' successors: the popes and bishops. The Church's ongoing teaching, rooted in the **apostolic tradition** but not recorded in Scripture, is called **sacred Tradition** (note the capital T).

"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 behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19–20

"The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you."

John 14:26

Scripture and Tradition

The Bible is a major and special part of the apostolic tradition, and the Church is rooted, nourished, and ruled by Scripture. The Catholic Church's teaching voice, the **magisterium**, was engaged before there was a New Testament. Today, the magisterium applies biblical teachings to new situations for each generation. Because we believe that the Church continues to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, these teachings become part of sacred Tradition, part of God's divine revelation to us. When new questions of faith and morality emerge, the Spirit guides the Church to discern Christ's will. The Church guides its members in right living, making Christ's teachings clear to them.

"You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:18–20

Core or Custom?

Through Scripture and sacred Tradition, God has revealed what we need to know for the sake of our salvation. We include in Tradition (big T) those truths that are core to Christianity. However, there are many traditions (small t) that aren't necessary for our salvation and so aren't part of (big T) Tradition. For example, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is core to our Tradition. The rosary is a prayer that enables us to meditate on the core truths of faith, but in itself is not part of sacred Tradition. It's important to distinguish between what's core and what's not, what's necessary for our salvation and what's a cherished practice ("Scripture and Tradition: Revealing God's Plan," Margaret Nutting Ralph, PhD).

Life contains many distractions and obstacles. A person's path to God is seldom straight and smooth. Yet here you are. God is present in your life and has led you to this moment. We can miss out on many wonderful things if we don't pay attention to the truth and signs around us. Ask the Spirit to show you God's hand in all of your experiences.

- What have been the greatest challenges to your life and faith?
- What opened your heart to seek God and truth?



Some Final Tips

- *Minimize distractions.* If you need to adjust location, position, lighting, temperature, or noise level to focus on God—and you’re able to do so easily—do it.
- *Be patient yet diligent.* If your mind wanders, gently return your attention to God, your prayer word(s), Scripture passage, or the concern at hand. If you get out of the habit, just start again. While in the moment, pause for a while. Does anything else emerge? Is there something Jesus wants to say to you?
- *Keep it simple.* Don’t try to say, do, or figure out too much. Whenever a prayer comes to you, let it out.
- *Don’t force it.* Don’t go through the motions for the sake of habit or accomplishment. If a prayer is no longer working, try something new. Just keep praying.
- *Don’t answer for God.* Prayer isn’t an order form for a perfect life. In responding to God’s call, make yourself vulnerable to his ways.

Practice one of the prayers listed in this lesson, then describe your experience in your journal.



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Prayer is communicating with God.
- Prayer has many forms and styles.
- We can pray alone or in a group.



How Do I Start?

Prayer begins in the heart; it is “the place of encounter...the place of covenant” (CCC 2563). You know how it feels to let someone into your heart; invite Jesus to meet you there, too. It can begin as simply as saying “hello”: *I’m here, God. I’m ready to talk and to listen.* Just showing up and agreeing to enter the conversation is an act of faith and love. Maybe you just want to sit and talk about what’s on your mind. It doesn’t matter if your prayer is deep, serious, lighthearted, long, or short. God meets you wherever you are.

“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”

St. John Damascene; CCC 2559

Your Prayer Life

We’ve come to know and believe that God made us, loves us, and longs to be in relationship with us. But we can’t have a relationship with someone we never talk to. Our faith has to become personal. Prayer helps make it personal.

What Is Prayer?

Prayer has a pretty broad definition. It’s really anything we do that brings us into conversation with God. It can be a conversation, a common prayer like the Our Father, or any experience that makes you feel closer to God. We can pray to God when we want to praise him, we can petition God when we need something, or we can give thanks to God for something good.

“I have called you by name: you are mine.”

Isaiah 43:1

What if God Doesn’t Respond?

God is always present and listening, but we’re not always aware of it—or of his response. Sometimes we focus so much on our words and needs and how we’re praying that we forget about God. *Let go of expectations.* God’s answers don’t always come in the way or on the timeline we envision. As life passes, listen for hints in conversations or in what you’re reading and watching. Maybe a sentence, image, or person will touch your heart with particular clarity. Maybe your feelings will begin to change. There might not be an immediate or obvious answer, but God *will* respond.

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Can I Pray “Wrong?”

Our prayer experiences won’t always be the same. Sometimes they will be deep; sometimes they will feel dull or flat. Isn’t that the way it is with most things?

Don’t worry about praying the “right” way. Don’t get discouraged. Speak openly and honestly to God—even if that means bringing your unattractive or unpopular parts with you. God can handle our bad attitudes and mistakes.

Kinds of Prayer

“Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative.”

CCC 2699

- 1. *Vocal prayer* includes private conversations and group expressions of praise and petition. It can be informal, spontaneous, traditional (Our Father), or liturgical (the Mass).
- 2. In *meditative prayer*, we reflect on something—often the Scriptures, a spiritual writing, or life events—in order to open our heart to God’s will. Common examples are *lectio divina* (page 3) and the rosary.
- 3. *Contemplative prayer* allows the Spirit to draw us into our own hearts. Its key components are finding a quiet place, asking God to guide and bless our contemplation, and being mindful of our breathing. As we pray, we might focus on a single word, image, or short prayer.

Within these categories, there are countless forms and styles. Try one of the prayers in this lesson, or find your own.

Pray With Nature

Go to a park, lake, garden, or zoo. Visit a nearby stream, field, or grove. Climb a mountain. Make it a journey to and with God. Remind yourself of the magnificence of his creation. Cultivate a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery.

- *Where do you get away from life’s demands? Is there a place that you find especially peaceful? Consider turning this place into a special prayer space.*

Visit a Holy Place

You don’t have to wait for Sunday to go to church. God is always present there. Many parishes also have chapels for **Eucharistic Adoration**—a “holy hour” of prayer and worship to Jesus in the Eucharist that takes place outside of Mass.

A **pilgrimage** is a “journey to a sacred place undertaken as an act of religious devotion” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). Whether the place is near or far, you are pursuing God, and the physical journey itself becomes a prayer. This tradition appears in the Old Testament. God’s people have always been a pilgrim people—on a journey to the holy, to God.

Pray Using Imagery

Saint Ignatius of Loyola bases much of his teaching about spiritual life on imagery. He recommends reading a Scripture passage slowly, especially stories about Jesus, picturing scenes in your mind, and imagining yourself in them. Let the story unfold with both Jesus and you present.

Pray With Scripture

The Church encourages “frequent reading of the divine Scriptures....Prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read’ the [Scriptures]” (CCC 2653).

One ancient Catholic practice is called **lectio divina**, or divine reading. Read a Scripture passage slowly and savor little bits of it. Often a word or phrase will stand out, or the scene will take on new life or meaning.

The writings of the saints can also lead our hearts deeper into prayer and closer to God. As we read the writings of holy people, we sense God’s nearness. That experience can transform us.

Write Your Prayer

Journaling is another way to express our thoughts and feelings toward God. When we feel spiritually dry, it can be helpful to reread something we wrote at a more vibrant point in our faith journey. It reminds us that God is always faithful, listening, and present. Jesus seems to say, “Remember when...?”

Sing Your Prayer

Saint Augustine is attributed with saying, “He who sings prays twice.” Sing familiar and favorite songs, or compose your own melody and lyrics. God doesn’t care about pitch or vocal quality. If you sing from your heart, it’s prayer! Playing an instrument can be prayer as well.

Pray With Your Body

Catholics kneel, fold their hands, bow, and much more. If you don’t know what to say, convey a message in gesture—lift your hands, bow your head, raise your face, or dance! We communicate with others through touch and body language all the time. Sometimes, words aren’t necessary.

Pray in Silence

In our busy lives, we can forget the value of simply being with God. It takes deliberate intention to seek him. At first, this prayer may last only a few seconds, but with practice, the time will lengthen. You can make—or find—these times throughout the day. Eventually, you’ll discover that you can “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Pray When You’re “Too Busy” to Pray

Busy lives mean we pray on the go, in the midst of daily life. Say a prayer as you get dressed in the morning, as you think about your kids during the day, or as you avoid a traffic accident on the drive home. While it’s good to make regular time for prayer, it’s also good to connect with God throughout your day.

Offer It Up

In the face of a challenge, dilemma, or trial, patiently enduring any suffering or accepting a minor sacrifice can become a prayerful offering of hope and faith in Christ, who redeems the world. Our suffering and sacrifice unites us to Christ as we recall his suffering and death that won our salvation.

Give Thanks in Prayer

We can make thankfulness the centerpiece of our prayer and life. Every evening, we can thank God for at least one thing we’ve never thought to thank God for before. The word *Eucharist* means “thanksgiving” or “grateful” in Greek; the Mass is our communal way of giving thanks to God. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude in your life.

Pray the News

Praying for others is as important as praying for ourselves. Choose a person or situation in the news, giving thanks for the good and requesting help for those in need. Besides countering any negative or false messages, this prayer connects us to the world and prompts us to appropriate action.

Pray the “Jesus Prayer”

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.



Sacramentals are visible signs that draw us to God and make all aspects of life holy. A common part of Catholic prayer and devotion, they may be divided into three broad categories:

- 1. Sacred actions—signing the cross, genuflecting.
- 2. Blessings—prayers and rituals, sprinkling or signing with holy water, laying on of hands, incensing.
- 3. Objects that aid us in worship and devotion—candles, blessed ashes and palms, Bibles, crucifixes, medals, statues, religious art.

The existence and popularity of sacramentals testify to the diversity of prayer in the Church and that prayer can involve all our senses and go beyond words.

Pray a decade of the rosary, part of the Liturgy of the Hours, or the Angelus as a group. Then capture your reaction(s) in your journal:

How did God speak to you in this prayer?

Would you like to pray this again or try a different prayer next session?



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- We connect to God through personal and traditional prayers.
- The rosary reflects the mystery of Christ.
- There are many traditional Catholic prayers to try.



The Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Matthew 6:9–15 and Luke 11:1–4

Catholic Prayers and Practices

Sometimes we can't find the words to pray. We may feel overwhelmed or unable to concentrate. In those moments, having prayers committed to memory is helpful. *Repeating a prayer can focus our attention on God and quiet our minds.*

Catholics repeat some prayers because we've found they're the best way to express certain thoughts to God. You may frequently say, "I love you" to your family because these are the simplest and clearest words to convey how you feel.

Memorizing prayers makes it easier to pray with others. When we pray together, we both express and enhance our sense of community.

- What effects and advantages of praying with other people do you see?



These basic prayers may be used alone or in combination with other Catholic prayers and rites.

This is the best-known prayer of Christianity, probably because it's the one Jesus taught his disciples when one of them said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). We are the adopted daughters and sons of God, and so we can call God "Father." We don't pray for ourselves alone but for everyone as members of God's family.

As children of God, we want to honor God. **Hallowed** means to "make holy"; we want God's name to be honored by all, and we want God's desire for humanity to be fulfilled. All that Jesus did and taught was the will of God. We pray that we may have help and strength to do God's will. And God's will is for us to have life and to have it fully (John 10:10).

Although spiritually Christ himself is our "bread of life," our daily bread for our life and faith journey, we ask God for all we need to live each day (John 6:35, 48). That includes forgiveness for the wrongs we have done. We recognize our sinfulness and acknowledge God's merciful love and forgiveness. If we hope for forgiveness from God, we must be willing to forgive others. Finally, we pray to be kept safe from the power of evil and all that leads to evil.

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You'll learn more about the Lord's Prayer in a later lesson.

- What might it mean to accept God as your "father?" How can prayer help you live out this decision?



The Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This blessing dates to the second century when Christians would trace a cross on their foreheads with their thumbs. The gesture is used in the anointing that's a part of baptism and confirmation.

The Sign of the Cross prayer is made by touching the fingertips of your right hand to your forehead, breast, left shoulder, then right shoulder. The gesture is accompanied by the words of the prayer honoring the Trinity. It's the traditional way Catholics begin and end our prayers. We also end most prayers by saying, "**Amen**," which means, "Yes; I believe."

The Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The Hail Mary begins with two biblical verses: the words of the Archangel Gabriel—"Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you"—and of Mary's cousin Elizabeth—"Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:28, 42). It concludes with a request that acknowledges Mary as the Mother of our Savior. In this prayer, we don't worship Mary; only God is worthy of our worship. We join God in honoring Mary because of her special relationship to Jesus and pray to be able to follow her example of surrendering to God's will.

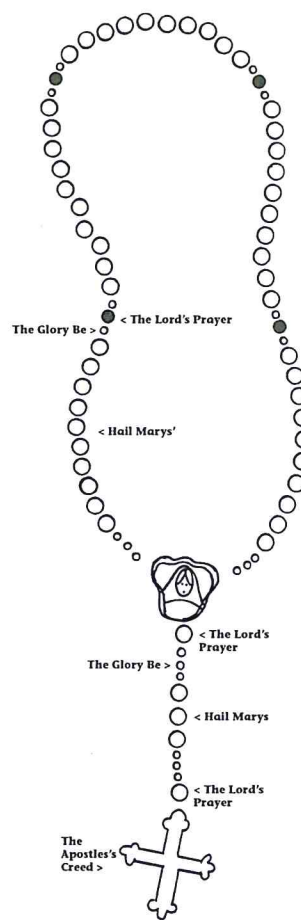
The Apostles' Creed

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

The Apostles' Creed "is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles' faith" (CCC 194). From the Latin for "I believe," our **creed** is a basic statement of Christian belief and an instrument of Church unity. It's most often recited at Mass or as part of a **chaplet**.

Chaplet: "Beads strung together on which prayers are counted as they are recited," such as a rosary; also, the series of prayers recited on such beads (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*).

The Rosary



The **rosary** is a meditation on the events (called "mysteries") in the life of Jesus and Mary. There are four sets, each including five mysteries: the Joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries, the Glorious Mysteries, and the Luminous Mysteries.

The rosary is an excellent everyday prayer and is especially useful when we want to pray but find it difficult or impossible to pray in our own words. For many Catholics, the rosary offers great comfort in difficult times.

1. Make the sign of the cross and say the Apostles' Creed.
2. Say the Lord's Prayer.
3. Say three Hail Marys.

4. Say the Glory Be and announce the first mystery.
5. Say the Lord's Prayer.
6. Say ten Hail Marys while meditating on the mystery.
7. Repeat steps 4, 5, and 6, continuing with the second, third, fourth, and fifth mysteries.

Other Catholic Prayers and Devotions

The **Liturgy of the Hours** (or **Divine Office**) is a repeating cycle of prayers, hymns, and readings for various "hours" of the day—up to a total of seven. *Hours* refers to how the prayers mark the phases of the day, *not* how long each prayer lasts. This is part of the daily, public prayer of the Church; the other part is the Mass.

Novena, from the Latin word meaning "nine," refers to a devotion that extends for nine consecutive days (weeks or months). The set number was originally based on the apostles' nine days of prayer between the ascension of Jesus and the Spirit's coming at Pentecost.

The **Angelus** is a prayer recounting the events that led up to our Lord's birth and our redemption. It is recited at 6 AM, noon, and 6 PM.

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is the prayerful ceremony in which a host of the Eucharist is exposed for adoration in a **monstrance**.



Genuflection—bending the knee as a sign of reverence for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Litany—literally a "list" of saints. After each saint is named, we sing or say, "Pray for us."

Gazing with faith upon an **icon** of Christ, the Virgin, saints, or angels, we experience a sense of presence. Icons ... draw us into a relationship with what the image represents," writes Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR, in *Embracing the Icon*.