

6. *Offering.* The offering of Jesus is accompanied with prayers of intercession for the entire Church, living and dead. The priest raises the bread and chalice—a gesture suggestive of offering. It's no longer Jesus alone who is offered to the Father; it's now Jesus *with* the Church.

7. *Great Amen.* An enthusiastic "Amen" places the seal of the community's approval on all that's been said and done in the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Communion Rite

1. *The Lord's Prayer.* This prayer reminds us that God is our Father and that we depend on him for everything.

2. *The Sign of Peace.* We exchange a sign of unity and communion with one another and with God.

3. *Communion.* Following the Lamb of God prayer asking for God's mercy, we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in holy Communion. We, though many, become one body in Christ. Each of us is empowered to share in the life and work of Christ, to bring him to all we meet.

The Concluding Rites

Following a blessing, the priest or deacon commissions those assembled to live out the challenges of the Gospel, bringing Christ to the world and also discovering him there.

- What is your life's purpose? What might your mission be as Christ's disciple?



Compare the Mass to the family table, where a family comes together to nourish and embrace each member as part of the family unit.

- What, including food, is brought to the table?
- How does each person contribute and participate?



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The Mass has two main parts.
- The Mass makes present Christ's dying and rising.
- Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.



"Then [Jesus] took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.'"

Luke 22:19–20

The Mass

The Mass is so important to Catholics that we participate in it every Sunday or Saturday evening. Many Catholics also attend Mass on weekdays.

Mass has been important enough over the centuries that people have died defending and exercising their religious freedom to participate in the Mass. In some places still today, Catholic priests offer the Mass in secret.

- What regular activities do you consider essential in your life? Why?



Why Is the Mass So Important?

At Mass, Catholics remember what Jesus did at the Last Supper. Jesus' words, "Do this in memory of me" have been obeyed without interruption for more than 2,000 years. Every time Catholics gather for Mass, we know we're there to do what Jesus commanded. And we believe that Jesus is made present to us.

Also known as the sacrament or sacrifice of the **Eucharist**, the **Mass** is our most precious prayer. It is a **liturgy**, part of the public worship or "work" of the Church and is "the summit and source of our Christian life....[I]n the Eucharist is found the entire treasure of the Church—Jesus Christ" (United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 228).

Let's briefly examine the principal parts of the Mass.

The Introductory Rites

The introductory rites bring the community together as one. The entrance of the priest and ministers completes the community—the people of God—in whose midst Christ is present.

As Mass begins, the priest leads us in the Sign of the Cross. We respond, "Amen." Response and participation are essential to liturgy. The prayer comes alive as each of us responds, listens, reflects, speaks, and sings.

Our awareness of God's presence reminds us that we haven't always lived as we should. We take part in a **Penitential Act**, which involves asking for and receiving God's forgiveness, perhaps with a prayer or the chant, "Lord, have mercy."

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Next comes the “**Gloria**,” an ancient hymn of praise. The opening lines from Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth express our wonder at what God has done. Then the priest says, “Let us pray,” and pauses for silence. Moments of silence provide space for a deeper experience of God’s presence. The priest gathers or collects our prayers in a prayer called the Collect.

Why So Much Sitting, Standing, and Kneeling?

God created us with physical bodies, so we worship God with our bodies, minds, and spirits. We *stand* as a sign of reverence—when encountering Christ in the gospel, in the Eucharist, and in moments of important conversation with God. We *sit* to listen and reflect. We *kneel* to express our humility before God and our adoration of God.

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth.”

Philippians 2:10

The Liturgy of the Word

The **Liturgy of the Word** is the first of two main parts of the Mass. We listen and reflect on the presence of God in the words of sacred Scripture.

- 1. The *First Reading* is from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season). It usually relates to the Gospel.
- 2. The *Responsorial Psalm* is a hymn of praise from the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament. The psalms were composed as song-prayers so it’s usually sung or chanted with the assembled people repeating a response.
- 3. The *Second Reading* is from the epistles (letters) of Paul or another New Testament letter. This reading doesn’t always relate to

the others but exposes us to more of sacred Scripture.

- 4. The *Gospel Acclamation*, usually an **Alleluia**—“Praise ye the Lord”—or another acclamation during Lent, acknowledges and welcomes Christ’s presence in God’s word.
- 5. The *Gospel* reading is proclaimed by the priest or deacon and is given highest honor because it contains the words of Jesus. With a thumb, we trace a small cross on our forehead, lips, and chest and silently pray these or similar words: *May your word, O Lord, be in my thoughts, on my lips, and in my heart.*
- 6. The **homily** follows the Gospel. In the homily, the priest or deacon explains the Scripture proclaimed at this Mass and applies it to our lives today.

How Are the Readings Chosen?

The Sunday Mass readings are arranged so that over a three-year period almost all of the New Testament and a varied selection from the Old Testament will be proclaimed. A new cycle begins each Advent. Year A features the Gospel of Matthew; Year B, Mark; and Year C, Luke. John’s Gospel is usually read during Easter, Christmas, and to fill out Year B because Mark’s Gospel is short. The Mass readings are proclaimed from a book called the **Lectionary**.

- 7. We stand and recite the main beliefs of our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed or Apostles’ Creed.
- 8. A deacon or lector presents our **petitions** (requests or appeals) in the **Universal Prayer**, also called the *Prayer of the Faithful* or general intercessions. After each petition we say, “Lord, hear our prayer” or a similar response.

Write Your Own Petition

Fill in the blanks to express a need to God in prayer:

For [person, group, situation] _____,
that [request or appeal] _____,
we pray to the Lord.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

We celebrate the wondrous deeds of God in every celebration of the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**, the second main part of the Mass.

Preparation of the Gifts

In the **offertory** or *Presentation of the Gifts*, we express our participation by making an offering, bringing to the altar the bread and wine for the Eucharist and our monetary contributions for the needs of the Church and the poor.

The bread and wine become for us the Body and Blood of Christ. God, who is never outdone in generosity, returns to us more than we could ever give.

- What can you offer God this week? How can your life become a living offering? (Mark 12:33; Ephesians 5:1–2)



The Eucharistic Prayer

This prayer is the center and highest point of the Mass. It’s spoken by the priest but is the prayer of the entire community.

- 1. *Acclamation of Praise*. All the faithful in heaven and on earth join in a song or chant of praise. The words of the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy)

come from Isaiah 6:3: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!” and Matthew 21:9: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.”

- 2. *Calling Upon God to Send the Spirit*. The priest asks God to send the Holy Spirit to achieve a twofold conversion: changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ and conforming us into the image of Christ.
- 3. *Institution Narrative and Consecration*. The priest recounts the Last Supper: how Jesus took the bread, blessed it, gave thanks, and said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:26–28).

In this moment of **consecration**, “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 for all” (CCC 1353). We call this the **Real Presence** of Christ in the Eucharist.

- 4. *Memorial Acclamation*. The people proclaim “the mystery of faith”—that Jesus died for our sins, rose from death, and will return in glory.
- 5. *Remembering*. God’s saving actions, accomplished in Christ, are remembered, not as past events but as events that continue to accomplish their effects here and now. Remembering isn’t just a recalling of the past; it’s making the past present in our midst. This bringing of the past into the present is what Jesus meant when he said, “Do this in memory of me.”



The Importance of Sunday

"The Lord's day, the day of Resurrection, the day of Christians, is our day. It is called the Lord's day because on it the Lord rose victorious to the Father. If pagans call it the 'day of the sun,' we willingly agree, for today the light of the world is raised, today is revealed the sun of justice with healing in his rays."

St. Jerome, In die dominica paschae homilia, CCL 78, 550

Sunday, the "Lord's day," is central to our liturgical life. Our observance begins on the Saturday evening before, and all Catholics are obligated to participate in Mass every weekend. There, "the Lord's Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet" (CCC 1166).

The Church also encourages us to treat Sunday as a day of rest, recreation, and family time as a way of keeping the Third Commandment: "Remember the sabbath day—keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God" (Exodus 20:8–10).

- How do you spend Sundays?
- How can you "keep it holy?"



Holy Days of Obligation

The Church year is full of **feast days** celebrating Jesus, Mary, and the saints. In the United States, six of these are **holy days of obligation**. Like Sundays, Catholics make these days holy by attending Mass and refraining from unnecessary work:

- Mary, the Holy Mother of God—January 1
- The **Ascension** of the Lord—forty days after Easter or the following Sunday
- The **Assumption of Mary**—August 15
- All Saints' Day—November 1
- The **Immaculate Conception** of Mary—December 8
- The **Nativity** of the Lord (Christmas)—December 25



Reflect on your typical day, week, or year. What routines or traditions do you have? When is your next vacation, family celebration, or home improvement? Mark the following:

- Times of high energy or positive emotion
- Times of study or preparation
- Times of calm, quiet, or relaxation
- Fixed or set times
- Flexible or movable times
- Times with community

Pray to God and invite him to be part of all the "times" of your life.

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- With Sundays at its center, the Church year follows a pattern of seasons.
- The Church calendar includes feasts, holy days, and saints' days.
- Colors, symbols, and themes have deep meanings.



The Church, like the Gospel writers, retells the story in time. Over the course of a year, the Church celebrates all these events, beginning with Christ's Incarnation and birth and ending with his Second Coming.

"In the course of the year...[the Church] unfolds the whole mystery of Christ."

CCC 1163

The Church Year

Christians long to retrace the steps of Jesus and walk with him through his life on earth. The Gospel writers did it. Anyone who has made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land has done it. As we hear the stories and follow the path year after year, we discover new truths and understand more deeply.

The fulfillment of our salvation through Jesus begins with the **annunciation**—Mary's consent to the archangel Gabriel's announcement that she had been chosen by God to be the Mother of his Son (Luke 1:26–38). The story unfolds as the magi arrive with gifts and the Holy Family flees to Egypt (Matthew 2). We observe the presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22–38) and search with Mary and Joseph for their lost Child some years later (2:41–50).

We see Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan, at his first miracle at a wedding in Cana, and at the Sea of Galilee as he calls his first disciples. We see him in Jerusalem and walk with him as he carries his cross. We see the tomb where he was laid and where death was defeated by his resurrection. We watch him ascend to heaven and wait with Mary and the apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

- What part(s) of Jesus' story do you want to know more about?
- How can Jesus' story speak to and guide your own story?



Liturgical Seasons

Like our natural year, the **Church year** follows a pattern of seasons. Also called the **liturgical year**, the Church year celebrates and relives the great events of our salvation. Each year follows a pattern, and our prayers and readings for Mass guide us in our celebrations.

Advent

During **Advent**, we share in the Israelites' long wait for the Messiah and enter into expectation and anticipation for the coming of our Savior. The season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas.

This time is one of joyful anticipation, of waiting in hope with Mary for the birth of our Lord.



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Catholics are encouraged to “keep Advent”—to avoid rushing into Christmas. In addition to preparing our hearts for the celebration of Christ’s birth, we also prepare our hearts for Jesus’ Second Coming and the fullness of the kingdom. An important way we prepare is by examining our lives and celebrating the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

Liturgical color: violet for royalty, humility, and hope

Traditions: Advent wreaths and calendars that help families count down to Christmas are common traditions. An Advent wreath is made of evergreen and holds four candles: three purple (violet) and one pink (rose). Each of the four Sundays of Advent is marked by the lighting of a candle. The candle for the third Sunday is pink as a sign of our joy that Christmas is near.

Christmas

The **Christmas** season marks the birth of Jesus. It lasts from Christmas Day until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord in early January. There are many special celebrations during this season.



Liturgical color: white for light, innocence, and joy

Traditions: Many Catholics intentionally leave up the Christmas tree, continue to display the Nativity scene, and joyfully sing Christmas carols and hymns long after the secular world sets them aside.

Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time follows the Christmas season for several weeks. It’s a time for reflecting on the mystery of Christ’s life and growing as a Church.



Liturgical color: green for growth and eternal life

Lent

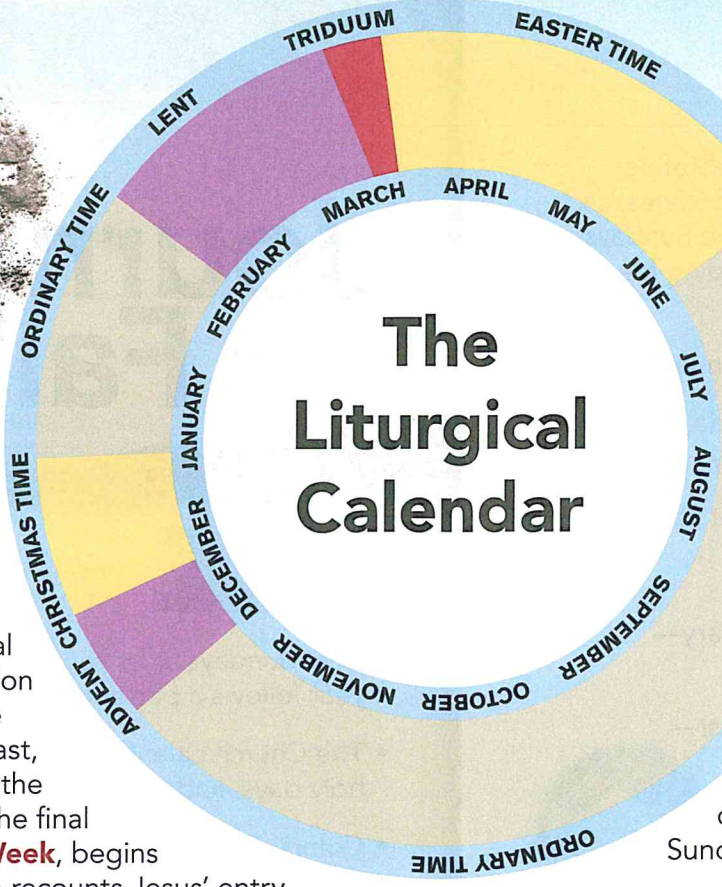
Lent is a penitential season that lasts forty days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending at the start of the Easter Triduum. During Lent, Catholics prepare themselves for the holiest days of the year. In anticipation of the renewal of their baptismal promises and the reception of new members into the Church, Catholics pray, fast, give alms, and celebrate the sacrament of penance. The final week, also called **Holy Week**, begins with **Palm Sunday**, which recounts Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–9) and his suffering and death that follow.

Liturgical color: violet for **penitence**: sorrow and repentance for one’s sins

Triduum

The **Triduum**, Latin for “three days,” begins with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening and continues through Good Friday and Holy Saturday until the evening of Easter Sunday. “Though chronologically three days, they are liturgically one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ’s paschal mystery. The single celebration of the Triduum marks the end of the Lenten season, and leads to the Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil” (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops).

Liturgical colors: Holy Thursday: white
Good Friday: red
Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday: white



Paschal Mystery:

“referring to the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by which he brought about salvation for all humanity” (A to Z: A Basic Catholic Dictionary).



Easter

During the **Easter** season, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his victory over sin and death. This season is so important that we can’t celebrate it in a day or even a week. We celebrate Easter for fifty days—a week of weeks—from Easter Sunday through Pentecost Sunday.

Liturgical color: white for light, victory, and glory

“We are an Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song.”

Attributed to St. Augustine

Since Jesus died during the Jewish Passover festival, the date of Easter is calculated accordingly. At the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), it was decided that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon following the first day of spring. This means Easter doesn’t occur on the same date each year—unlike Christmas, which always falls on December 25.

- What is the date for next Easter? How might its celebration be more meaningful to you?



Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time returns following the Easter season and ends the last Sunday before Advent: the feast of Christ the King. Ordinary Time is a time for reflecting on the mystery of Christ’s life and growing as a Church.

Liturgical color: green for growth and eternal life

Rhyme and Reason

Our lives follow rhythms similar to the cycle of the Church year. Whether these rhythms are in step or not, the Church guides us through the cycle and seasons of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

On our high days—times of discovery, accomplishment, fulfillment, commitment, and authenticity—the Church shows us how to celebrate these gifts with joy.

In times of disappointment, struggle, weakness, failure, and loss, the Church reminds us that light follows darkness, spring follows winter, and Easter follows Good Friday.

In times of coming and going, falling down and getting back up, learning to love and asking for forgiveness, the Church reminds us of God’s faithful and enduring presence.

As we move through the liturgical year, with its different themes and postures of the heart, we support and celebrate the times of Advent waiting and Christmas celebrations, the sorrows of Good Friday and Easter joys of new life and community. The Church year helps us connect our own stories with the story of God, helping us find greater meaning in every part of life.

Other Religious Places

In Old Testament times, the Israelites went on **pilgrimage**—a journey to a sacred place—to the Temple in Jerusalem. Here they could worship, pray, and encounter God in a deeper way. The Holy Land is another popular destination for both Jews and Christians today. Pilgrims sail on the Sea of Galilee and visit places where Jesus and the apostles lived, taught, healed, and nurtured the growth of early Christian communities.

Catholics also visit **shrines**. A shrine may be where a holy object—statue, image, or relic—is housed. It may also be the location of a saint's life or burial, a miracle, or an appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

- If you could make a pilgrimage to anywhere in the world, where would it be? Why?



Think of all the Catholic symbols, objects, and places you know so far. Pick one that represents your journey of faith. Explain your choice in your prayer journal.



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Catholics use their parish church for public worship and personal prayer.
- Every place and object in a church building has special significance.
- When we gather in church, Christ is in our midst.



- Describe a place that's sacred or holy to you.
- To what or to whom is your local parish dedicated? How does the parish share that event or person's story?



Although each church is unique, we expect to find certain things in all of them. The following will help you understand some key symbols and objects you'll find in a Catholic church building.

Places in a Catholic Church

Where do you feel a strong presence of God? Maybe you think of a forest, a mountain, or the ocean. Perhaps a place where you felt safe and loved as a child comes to mind. God is everywhere, but certain places help us feel his presence more profoundly. Catholics encounter God in many places. In fact, you've likely already visited a place Catholics believe "exists solely for the good of souls" (Pope Paul VI, *Christus Dominus*, 31).

That place is the local **parish**. The term parish can refer to the community and to the buildings used by the community, just as the term church can refer to the faith community and to the building where Catholics gather to pray.

Most parishes have territorial boundaries and serve the people of the local area. Some parishes aren't territorial but serve specific groups with particular nationalities, languages, or rites. A parish may be named to honor a person of the Trinity, a saint, or a significant event in the life of Jesus or Mary.

The Sanctuary: Front and Center

The **sanctuary** (1) is the main area of focus for liturgical ceremonies. In this area, you'll find the main **altar** (2) or Lord's table, which is the focus of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. During the Eucharistic Prayer, the offerings of bread and wine brought to this altar become the Body and Blood of Christ. At the altar, the priest reads from the **Roman Missal** (3), the book of prayers used at Mass. Candles adorn the altar to symbolize Christ's presence and light.

Often to one side of the altar is the **ambo** (4). You'll find the Lectionary, the book of Mass readings, here. What happens here is the focus of the Liturgy of the Word. Nonscriptural reading and song leading may occur at a secondary **lectern** (5).

A cross or **crucifix** (6)—a cross containing the image of Christ's body—reminds us of his suffering and death. You'll find one placed either on or near the altar. It may be used in procession at the beginning and end of Mass.

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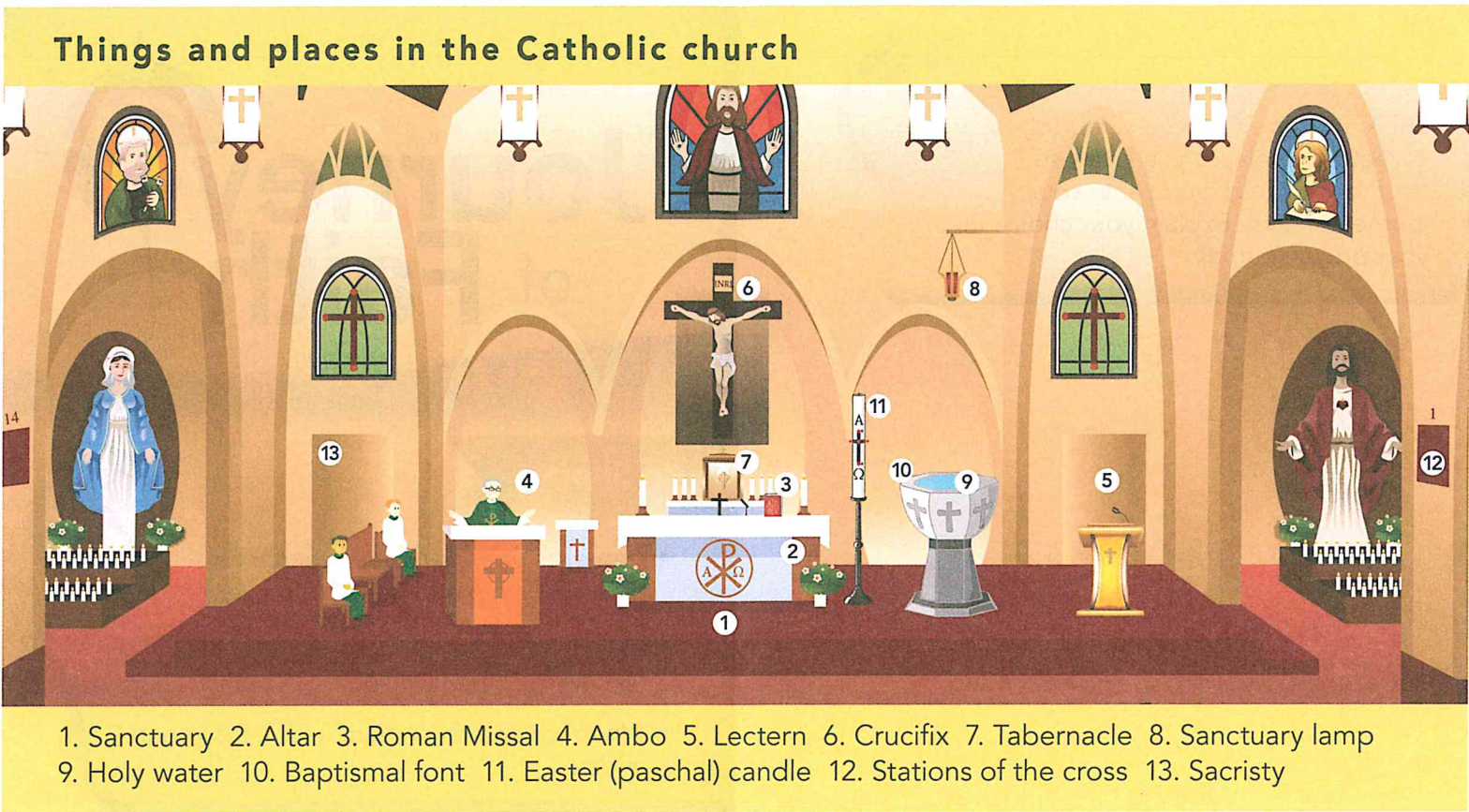
The **tabernacle** (7) is a special receptacle in which the eucharistic bread is reserved for the purpose of bringing Communion to the sick and for private devotion. The **sanctuary lamp** (8), often red in color, houses a candle that continuously burns near the tabernacle to remind us of Jesus' presence there. The tabernacle may be in the main space of the church or in a separate room or space nearby.

Do Catholics Worship Images?

The crucifix is a symbol that reminds us of the salvation won through Christ's death and resurrection. Images of Christ remind us of St. Paul's mandate to "proclaim Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Catholics don't worship the images of Jesus or the saints found in Catholic churches and homes. God alone is worthy of our worship. These images in statues, stained-glass windows, paintings, and mosaics are just visible representations of spiritual realities. Through them, we grow in appreciation for and union with what they represent—the living and divine person of Christ and the saints in heaven.

Other Places in Church

1. Most parishes have a **narthex** or **gathering space** that divides the main entrance from the nave, the people's worship area. The narthex may feature pamphlet racks or bulletin boards and be used for fellowship before and after Mass. It also functions as a starting place for processions, certain rites, and to transition between the liturgy and everyday life.
2. When you walk into church, you'll see a small bowl of water. This is a font containing **holy water** (9) that has been blessed by a priest to be used as a reminder of baptism. The faithful dip the tips of their fingers into the water and make the Sign of the Cross as they enter and leave the church.
3. The **baptismal font** (10) is a large, raised vessel or basin in which holy water is contained for baptisms. It's found in a prominent place, either near the entrance of the church or in the sanctuary. In churches where baptism by immersion is performed, the font may be a larger pool. When placed near the main entrance, a baptismal font may also serve as the holy water font.



1. Sanctuary 2. Altar 3. Roman Missal 4. Ambo 5. Lectern 6. Crucifix 7. Tabernacle 8. Sanctuary lamp 9. Holy water 10. Baptismal font 11. Easter (paschal) candle 12. Stations of the cross 13. Sacristy

4. The **Easter** (or **paschal**) **candle** (11) is a large, ornamented candle symbolic of the risen Christ and often positioned near the altar, lectern, or baptismal font. During the Easter season, it burns at every liturgy. It's also placed next to the casket during funerals as a sign of our hope in the resurrection and of our faith that Christ will receive the departed into the fullness of his kingdom.
5. The **Stations of the Cross** (12) (also **Way of the Cross**) are fourteen crosses or images representing or depicting the steps Jesus took to his death. They are usually located along the inside walls of the church. Catholics use them to meditate on Christ's suffering.
6. The **reconciliation chapel**, sometimes called the confessional or reconciliation room, is a private space where a person celebrates the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Most of these provide for confessions to be made anonymously (behind a screen) or face to face with the priest.

• How does it feel to know that your baptismal or confirmation candle will be lit by the Easter candle, spiritually joining you to Christ?



"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

Clerical Vestments

The **sacristy** (13) is the room where the priest and ministers prepare for liturgical services and put on their religious garments called **vestments**. The main vestments worn at Mass are:

1. An **alb**: a long, white garment symbolic of the purity one should have when approaching God. Priests, deacons, and altar servers wear albs.
2. A **cincture**: a belt or cord, often white, worn around the waist over the alb.
3. A **chasuble**: the outermost garment worn by the priest during Mass. The color of the chasuble matches the liturgical season or feast. Deacons may wear a similar but shorter garment called a **dalmatic**.
4. A **stole**: a narrow, fabric band that's worn around the neck by priests and bishops. A deacon wears a stole over his left shoulder like a sash.

• How does what you wear to church symbolize the way you feel about God?



Also on the Parish Campus

Outside of church, parish activities may be held in a gym, cafeteria, hall, or parish center. The **rectory** is where the priest or priests reside. If a religious institute is associated with your parish or nearby, its members may live in a communal home. These homes go by various names: **convent**, **monastery**, **cloister**, **friary**, or **abbey**.

Types of Churches

A **diocese** is a geographical area entrusted to the pastoral care of a **bishop**. Examples of dioceses in the United States are Albany and Baton Rouge. A large or significant diocese is called an **archdiocese**, which is led by an **archbishop**. Three U.S. archdioceses are St. Louis, Chicago, and Los Angeles. A diocese or archdiocese may be subdivided into **deaneries** consisting of several parishes, and all are divided into parishes. The (arch) bishop's offices and programs are centralized in the **chancery**, sometimes called the diocesan curia or Catholic Center.

A **cathedral** is the (arch)bishop's official parish church. The Latin word cathedra means "chair," which is the symbol of the bishop's leadership. The pope's cathedral is the Basilica of St. John Lateran. A **basilica** is a church designated as a place of special historical or architectural (artistic) importance. As the traditional "home parish" of the pope, the Lateran Basilica is considered more important than any other church, even St. Peter's in Vatican City.

The **Vatican** is the worldwide administrative headquarters of the Catholic Church and the pope's official residence.

• In what (arch)diocese is your parish located? What is the name and location of the cathedral?



Parish Ministries

"To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."

1 Corinthians 12:7

According to St. Paul, the people in the Church are responsible for teaching, mighty deeds, healing, assistance, even administration (1 Corinthians 12:28). These roles appear in various titles and positions within a parish, such as:

- **Pastoral Administrator:** In the absence of a full-time pastor, this person handles the pastoral care of the parish that doesn't involve celebrating the sacraments.
- **Parish Council:** This advisory body is made up of elected or appointed people who assist the pastor in the administrative and spiritual life of the parish.
- **Director / Coordinator of Religious Education or Pastoral Associate:** These men and women manage the religious formation of parish members. They provide resources and programs for spiritual growth and development.
- **Lectors:** These liturgical ministers read from Scripture (except the Gospel) at Mass and other liturgies.
- **Altar Servers or Acolytes:** These people assist at the altar during Mass.

- **Extraordinary Ministers of holy Communion:** These trained laypeople assist the clergy in distributing the Eucharist during Mass and may take Communion to the sick and homebound.

- **Music Ministers:** These liturgical ministers include the organist and instrumentalists as well as singers. The **cantor** may lead the songs, especially the Responsorial Psalm at Mass.

Who's Who?

For each title or ministry below, identify who serves in that role for your parish.

RCIA coordinator, director, or team leader:

Director of Religious Education:

Lector(s):

Extraordinary Minister(s) of holy Communion:

Music or choir director:

How do you already serve God's people and Church in your daily life?

What Catholic ministries or parish groups interest you?

Journey of Faith

In Short:

- Christ is the head of the Church.
- Those who lead the Church do so with a spirit of service.
- We trace our Church leaders back to Peter and the apostles.

Who Shepherds the Church?

Who affects your daily life the most? Certainly your spouse or boss plays a large part in determining your focus, time, and efforts. But friends, coworkers, children, and parents can also change the course of a day, week, project, or event, propelling you forward or turning your attention to something unexpected.

Any time people live or work together, they establish roles and responsibilities to clarify how decisions will be made and work accomplished. This can happen casually, as with roommates, or formally, as within a business. The Church also benefits from organization; its hierarchy and various roles serve the whole of God's people. Following Jesus' example, those who lead the Church are to do so with a spirit of service.

"If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

John 13:14–15

- How is your workplace or living arrangement structured?
- How do you make decisions, divide tasks, and work together?

The Pope

Christ is the head of the Church, and all Christians are united in him. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave his apostles special roles and authority in order to continue his mission on earth. Catholics believe these roles and authority have been passed down through the centuries.

In particular, Jesus gave the Apostle Simon Peter a position of ultimate authority and leadership among Jesus' followers. After Peter's martyrdom in Rome, a successor was chosen, inheriting his title of "rock" on which the Church is built (Matthew 16:18). Today, the **pope**, as bishop of Rome, is looked upon as Peter's successor, the recognized leader of the Catholic Church on earth.

The pope also inherits Peter's responsibility to serve the whole Church and the faith that has been handed down. Acting in union with all the bishops, the pope preserves and spreads Christ's teaching as revealed in Scripture, sacred tradition, and the ongoing unfolding of divine revelation. His authority and governance come from the **Holy See** (sometimes *Apostolic* or *Roman See*), which includes the **Roman Curia**—Vatican officials and offices who assist him in the day-to-day handling of Church matters and resources.

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Peter and Church Authority

Read and reflect on the Scripture passages below. How does each one illustrate the unique role of Peter (and the popes after him)?

Matthew 16:13–20 John 1:40–42

John 21:15–17 Acts 1:15–16, 21–26

Acts 10:9–42 Acts 15:1–12

Is the Pope Infallible?

It's easy to misunderstand what the Church means by papal infallibility. It does not mean that the pope never makes a mistake. It does not mean that the pope never sins. What **infallibility** does mean is that under these certain specific conditions, the teaching of the pope is preserved from error by the Holy Spirit:

- The pope must be speaking in his capacity as chief leader and shepherd of the Church.
- He must be clearly defining a teaching as being a truth of faith to be accepted by the whole Church.
- The teaching must be concerned with matters of faith or morals.

The more common teachings of the pope (in homilies, speeches, encyclicals, and so on) don't fulfill these conditions. In fact, the total number of infallible statements is very small. One example is the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, declared in 1950 by Pope Pius XII. Nevertheless, Catholics give due respect to all the teachings of the pope, whether infallible or not.

The Bishops

Peter was only one of the twelve apostles Jesus appointed "to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mark 3:14–15). Catholics teach that the bishops are the successors to these remaining apostles. Through the sacrament of holy orders (ordination), the bishops continue Christ's mission and the work of the apostles and remain in communion with the pope in Rome.

In a large diocese, an **auxiliary bishop** may assist with sacramental and administrative duties.

The pope designates some members of the clergy as **cardinals**. They may vote in the election of a new pope until the age of eighty in a private, prayerful meeting called a **conclave**.

Conferences of bishops and their agencies express and apply Catholic teaching to important religious and social topics within a specific country, region, or culture. Examples are the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (**USCCB**) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB).

A **papal nuncio** is an archbishop who acts as the official Vatican delegate to a country. He holds the diplomatic rank of ambassador. In the U.S. and Canada, he also functions as a facilitator between these countries' bishops and the Vatican offices in Rome.

- What qualities make a good leader?



Priests

"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."

Matthew 28:19–20

Bishops ordain **priests** as coworkers in their mission. A **diocesan priest** is attached to a specific diocese under the authority of the local bishop. A **religious priest** is a member of a religious community and may work in various parts of the world at the invitation of local bishops.

A **pastor** is the bishop's direct representative to a parish. Larger parishes may also have an **associate pastor** (or **parochial vicar**). **Monsignor** is an honorary title given to a priest in recognition of his contributions to the life of the Church.

Deacons

Finding themselves in need of assistants, the apostles said, "Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task" (Acts 6:3). The apostles prayed and laid hands on the chosen men.

Today, this is the ministry of a **deacon** ("servant" in Greek), an ordained member of the clergy. A deacon can be **transitional** (a step on the path to priesthood) or **permanent**. Permanent deacons may be married but only if they were married at the time of ordination.

- Is there a deacon at your local parish? What are his duties and responsibilities?



Sisters and Brothers

"If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor....Then come, follow me."

Matthew 19:21

When the rich young man heard Jesus say these words, "he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (19:22), but others answer Jesus' call and follow Christ as **religious** priests, brothers, or sisters. Examples of religious institutes are the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans), the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), and the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists). Religious take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in order to follow Christ more faithfully.

Some people use the word nun to describe all women in religious institutes. The more appropriate title is **sister**. A **nun** is a sister who belongs to a cloistered (secluded and contemplative) order and resides in a monastery.

A **brother** is a nonordained member of a religious order of men. Priests and brothers in monastic orders are referred to as **monks**. Some religious communities include laypersons and deacons. All men and women, religious or lay, who profess vows of poverty, chastity (in the form of celibacy or perpetual virginity), and obedience are called **consecrated**.

The Laity

Baptized Catholics who aren't ordained make up the **laity** of the Church. Laypeople live out their baptism by bringing the presence of Christ to the world and striving for holiness in their daily lives. Lay adults serve God in marriage or in the single life.

"The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth..."

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
(Lumen Gentium), 33.

There are many inspiring examples of Catholics today actively living as part of Christ's body.

Search your parish bulletin, diocesan publication, or a national Catholic media site for an example of a person or organization that:

1. offers their particular gifts and talents for the greater good.
2. illustrates Christ's presence in the world.
3. reflects the love of the Trinity.
4. works for reconciliation and/or greater unity within the Church.

Share your findings with the rest of the group.

Journey of Faith

In Short:

- The Church is both an institution and a living body.
- Christians are to live as Christ's body in the world.
- The Holy Spirit faithfully guides the Church to the truth.

united vision of God—a people acting as one through the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts.

"By Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an 'adopted son' he can henceforth call God 'Father,' in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church."

CCC 1997

The Church as Community

What do you think of when you hear the word *church*? You might have thought of a building or the pope and bishops. Perhaps you thought of your RCIA group or the Mass.

The word *church* has many different meanings. For Catholics, however, church is more than a building or a group of people or a liturgy. The truth is expressed at the beginning of Mass: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (*The Roman Missal, Third Edition*).

The unity of Christians lies in the Trinity. The Church is people united, not by a building or a hierarchy or an organization, but by someone.

The Second Vatican Council declares that the Church shines forth as "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 4). The Church is the community of all those who have been drawn into the life of God "by faith and Baptism" (CCC 804) and the continuing presence of Christ leading them to a

Read the Scripture passages below and identify how the Church is described:

Colossians 1:18	1 Peter 2:9–10
Ephesians 2:19–20	1 Corinthians 3:9
1 Timothy 3:15	Galatians 3:28

Why Do We Need the Church?

We are made in the image and likeness of God. Since God is a loving community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are created to be in community as well.

Jesus came to draw us into the "community love" of the Trinity. Jesus lived, died, and rose to bring all people into one family (John 10:16–18). At the Last Supper, he asked us to love one another as he loves us (John 15:12) and prayed that we would be one, as he and the Father are one (17:20–21).

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Jesus formed the community of believers into the sign of his continuing presence on earth: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). When Saul was persecuting Christians after Jesus had ascended into heaven, he encountered the risen Christ asking him, "Why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul (later called Paul) came to understand the unity between Christ and believers: in persecuting Christians, he had been persecuting Jesus himself.

"There are many parts, yet one body....If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. You are Christ's body, and individually parts of it."

1 Corinthians 12:20, 27-27

What Did Paul Mean by Calling the Church Christ's Body?

Paul uses the terms *body of Christ* and *church* interchangeably. **Church** (*Ekklesia* in Greek) is an assembly of people called forth, "the people of God." Christ calls forth believers to share him with the world, saying: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The Church must continue the love of Christ on earth and mirror the love of the Trinity.


Christ put a great deal of trust in his apostles and in us. He depends on all Christians to continue his work. His ongoing mission through the Church depends on his followers being Christ to the world. Before Jesus was crucified, he lived in his own mortal body through which he could speak, listen, touch, forgive, heal, comfort, share, pray, love, unite, and bless. Now the Church is his body.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.*

St. Teresa of Ávila

Parents raising their children, students attending class, adults at their jobs, priests in their ministries, the elderly in nursing homes—all are the body of Christ by virtue of baptism.

- What gifts do you bring to the body of Christ?



The Mystical Body

The **Mystical Body of Christ** describes the whole Church, united with one another and with Christ as its head. In addition to calling the Church the Body of Christ, we use the terms People of God, Bride of Christ, and Temple of the Holy Spirit (CCC 781–798).

Each member is uniquely part of the body of Christ. All Christians are called to work together as one, just as the parts of the human body work together. Although made up of individuals, members of the Church don't live for themselves alone but for the entire body of Christ. In the celebration of the Mass, Catholics are joined in prayer as one body.

Did Jesus Intend to Start a Church?

The first generation of Christians believed that Christ intended to establish a Church (Matthew 16:18) with leaders who would make decisions ratified by God (Matthew 18:18). Christ gave them ritual observances (Luke 22:19), rules of conduct (Matthew 6:21–22), and guidelines for marriage (Mark 10:11).

We know Jesus wanted to build a community because he gathered disciples around him. He called them his "little flock" and spoke to them of his kingdom. He taught them the message they were to proclaim and appointed twelve of them as apostles. But he didn't leave a clear plan for how to continue this work after his ascension into heaven.

The apostles drew upon Jesus' sayings, teachings, and commands as well as his lived example. His death and resurrection were vindication and approval of all he'd done. Finally, he sent the Holy Spirit to remind them of all he said and did to guide their journey even as times changed and new questions emerged in the area of faith and morals.

How Does God Guide the Church?

Since the Church on earth is made up of human beings who aren't perfect, it's to be expected that the Church will be less than perfect. "The Church... will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven" (*Lumen Gentium*, 48).

Jesus knew that those who would represent him were subject to failure. Peter denied him three times, but Jesus, after his resurrection, gave Peter a threefold commission to care for his flock (John 21:15–18). The apostles ran away when Jesus was arrested, yet he appeared to them after his resurrection and sent them to preach the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:16–20).


The early Church had all the problems found in the Church today. (And indeed, similar problems can be found in any large, human organization.) Scanning through the Acts of the Apostles, readers will find liars and hypocrites (5:1–11), complaints of unfairness (6:1), use of religion for personal gain (8:9–24), disagreements about doctrine (15:24), conflicts among Church leaders (15:36–41), and preaching that failed to make an impact (17:22–34). The community in Corinth struggled with questions about pastors' salaries, disorder at worship ceremonies, scandal, and neglect of the poor (1 Corinthians 5—11). All these problems naturally arise when people try to follow Jesus and fall short because of human weakness and sin.

In spite of these challenges and human failures, the Church has been the means through which millions of people in every age and of every class and race have come to know Jesus Christ and his life-giving message. From its ranks, the Church has produced individuals universally recognized for their outstanding goodness and holiness—people like Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Calcutta, Oscar Romero, and Dorothy Day.

At times in the Church's history, some of its members have been unfaithful to the Spirit of God. But the Spirit always remains faithful, leading the Church to the truth. That's why the Church continues to be a sign of Christ's presence in the world and to proclaim his message of love, forgiveness, dignity, joy, hope, and peace.

All members of Christ's body are responsible for making Christ physically present to those among whom they live and work. They carry on the tradition—the gifts, legacy, mission, and truths—they have received. They not only strive to learn about the Church but also endeavor to be the Church, the body of Christ in the world today.

- How can you make Christ present in the world through your daily life?



How Is Mary the Mother of the Church?

From the cross, Jesus said to Mary, "Woman, behold, your son" (John 19:26). Then he said to the beloved disciple, "Behold, your mother" (19:27). In that moment, Jesus presents Mary as a mother to all Christian disciples. For this reason, Mary is the "Mother of the Church."

Mary supported and remained with the early Church until she was assumed into heaven. She continues to intercede and care for us today.

What Are Marian Apparitions?

Many trustworthy and holy people have reported **apparitions**, or supernatural visions, of Mary and messages that have been the source of countless blessings. Shrines dedicated to these appearances are visited by millions each year—most notably Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, Lourdes in France, and Fatima in Portugal.

The Catholic Church doesn't require belief in such appearances, but official declarations have stated that certain apparitions and the messages associated with them are worthy of belief and compatible with Catholic doctrine. Scripture affirms that God sent angels as messengers of his word; it's just as reasonable to believe that Jesus could send his Mother.

Hundreds of miracles at Marian shrines have been studied and declared to be beyond medical explanation. Those who study these miracles are amazed at the evident presence of God's power and grace working through the intercession of Mary as well as her maternal affection and care for us.

- Which Marian apparition most intrigues you? Why?



Mary responded to God's grace and blessings with humble acceptance, peaceful patience, and joyful praise.

How can you show Mary your gratitude for giving us Jesus?

How can you praise God and spread his salvation in your own life, family, and community?



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Catholics honor Mary as Jesus' first and most perfect disciple.
- Mary intercedes for us as Jesus' Mother and Mother of the Church.
- Mary's titles express aspects of her relationship with Jesus and with us.



- Think of a woman who has influenced your life. What makes her so special to you?



Who First Honored Mary?

God the Father honored Mary by choosing her and allowing the fullness of divinity to take human form within her. The angel Gabriel, sent from God, announced: "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). This greeting has become the first part of the Hail Mary prayer.

Jesus, the Son of God, honored Mary. He chose her to be his mother. At the beginning of his public ministry, he changed water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana because she requested it (John 2:1–11).

The first disciples honored Mary. She prayed with them as they waited for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). Just as Jesus was born of Mary, so the Christian Church was born at Pentecost with Mary present.

The early Church honored Mary. Saint Luke honored Mary in the stories of the annunciation, visitation, and birth of Christ. Mary was a popular figure for devotion among the first Christians. As early as AD 150 in the catacombs of Rome, people painted pictures of Mary holding the baby Jesus.

Mary

Jesus is at the center of the Catholic faith. This lesson is about Mary, his Mother, one of the most honored people in the faith. When Mary was asked to be the mother of the Son of God, she responded: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Mary accepted God's will for her life. She became the Christ bearer, the one through whom Jesus, our hope for salvation, entered the world, making our redemption possible.

So it makes sense that those who confess Jesus as their Lord would also respect and **venerate** (honor and revere) Mary. If we love Jesus, we love his mother because of her important role in his life. "Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it" (CCC 964).

"Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Luke 1:42

"Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did."

St. Maximilian Kolbe

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CCC 963–975

How Do Catholics Honor Mary?

Catholics honor Mary by taking her as our Mother and learning to imitate her. Mary accepted God's will completely. She was the first and most perfect of Christ's disciples, making her first among the **saints** (holy people in heaven). She shows us how to follow Jesus and share his gospel with others. In honoring and imitating Mary, we praise and thank God for all he has done through her.

Catholics also honor Mary by requesting her **intercession**, asking her to pray to God for us or to join her prayer with ours. Is it necessary to do this? No. We can pray directly to God. By calling on Mary's intercession, however, we have someone praying for and with us who is very close to Jesus.

Does devotion to Mary replace dedication to God? No. Mary is a created being and a servant of the Lord. She points us to Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. In praying to Mary, Catholics don't **worship** (adore or pay homage to) her. God alone is worthy of worship. We do, however, honor her for her important role in our salvation and for her acceptance of God's will.

"Mary hears the word of God and keeps it. In this, she is, as Pope Paul VI called her in Marialis Cultus, 'our sister' in faith."

Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, *In Search of the Real Mary*

What Is the Immaculate Conception?

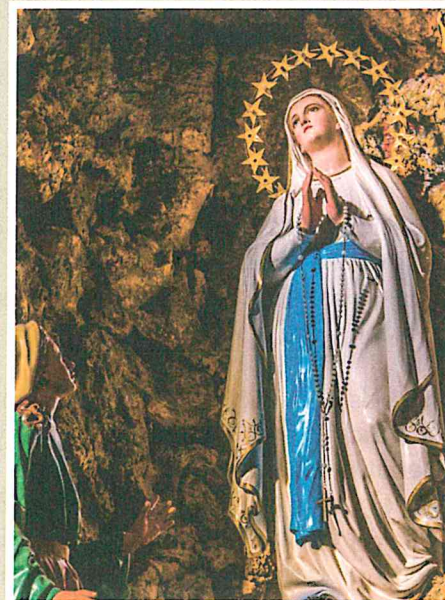
The **dogma** of the Immaculate Conception proclaims that Mary was free of original sin from the moment of her conception in her mother's womb and free of all personal sin throughout her life. In other words, God saved her from the inheritance of Adam and Eve's sin and prevented her from the corruption and burden of guilt. This allowed Mary to be the spotless vessel that received and carried the perfect and divine Son of God.



Our Mother of Perpetual Help



Our Lady of Guadalupe and Pope Francis



Our Lady of Lourdes

Dogma: a doctrine (teaching) of the Church that cannot be disputed or denied. Its belief and acceptance by the faithful is necessary for salvation.

This sinless state both recalls our original existence in the Garden of Eden and foreshadows eternal life in God's kingdom. Just as Eve symbolizes our fallen human nature, Mary symbolizes the redeemed nature of the saints in heaven. For this reason, the Church refers to her as the "new Eve."

What Is the Assumption of Mary?

Mary's gifts and graces didn't end with her last breath. Pope Pius XII defined the dogma of the assumption in these words: "the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory" (*Munificentissimus Deus*, 44, November 1, 1950).

We, too, are meant to be with God in heaven one day—body and soul. Just as Jesus' resurrection is our sign of hope, Mary's assumption is the first fruit of God's promise that the faithful will share in that resurrection.

Read the Gospel passages and quote below. Identify two qualities of Mary. Then reflect on how you can imitate Mary in your own life in your journal.

Luke 1:26–38 (the annunciation)
 Luke 1:39–56 (the visitation)
 Luke 2:1–21 (the birth of Jesus)
 John 2:1–12 (the wedding at Cana)
 John 19:25–27 (standing by the cross)

"[Mary] was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed...a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile...a woman whose action helped to strengthen the apostolic community's faith in Christ (see John 2:1–12), and whose maternal role was extended and became universal on Calvary."

Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 37

Why Do Catholics Call Mary Ever-Virgin?

Mary conceived Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:34–35). Catholic teaching and tradition affirm that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth as well. Mary's call to perpetual virginity enabled her to consecrate herself totally to the love of God and to her son.

Some Bible passages such as Mark 6:3 say that Jesus had siblings. Catholics don't interpret these to mean that Mary bore other children. In some Jewish accounts, all close relatives including cousins were referred to as brothers. A second-century tradition indicates that these were Joseph's children from a previous marriage. In John's Gospel, Jesus entrusted Mary to the beloved disciple (19:26–27). Saint Hilary of Poitiers taught that Jesus wouldn't have done that if Mary had other sons (*Commentary on Matthew*, 1:4 [AD 354]).

Why Do We Call Mary the Mother of God?

Mary is the Mother of God because Jesus is God, and his divine and human natures can't be separated. This doesn't mean Mary was the source of his divine nature; he received only his human nature from her. As the second person of the Trinity, the Son has existed for all eternity. Yet at the moment of his Incarnation, the Son became both human and divine in Jesus. Since Mary is the Mother of a divine person, it's proper to call her the "Mother of God."

"The One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly 'Mother of God.'"

CCC 495



Imagine yourself in a conversation with God as you share with him your answers to the following questions. Record both sides of the conversation in your journal.

Do you want to do God's will? How do you want to be transformed by God?

How can you open yourself more to this saint-making journey?

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The saints are our models for faithful living.
- The communion of saints includes those in heaven, purgatory, and on earth.
- Canonization is the process used to declare someone a saint.



All Are Called to Be Saints

The Russian Orthodox word for a saint, *prepodobnia*, means "very, very like." During their lives, saints become "very, very like" Jesus. We are each called to become like Jesus, too.

Maybe you don't think of yourself as holy because you haven't done anything great or are aware of your many sins. That's no excuse. Considered one of the greatest saints, Thérèse of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun who lived in a cloister and died at age twenty-four, is admired in part because of her rejection of things the world saw as important. She simply found holiness in everyday things.

Some saints struggled with their studies while some were scholars. Some saints were married, some divorced, some single, and some members of the clergy or religious communities. Some saints died at twelve years old while some lived 100 years. There are saints from all ethnic and racial backgrounds, saints with disabilities, saints who grew up homeless, and saints who grew up to be kings and queens.

"We are all called to be saints. God expects something from each of us that no one else can do."

Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement

The Saints

Think of someone you consider to be a faithful Christian. Much like the person who came to your mind, the saints are real people who led holy lives. You might not think of people in your life—or yourself!—as holy.

The truth is, we're all called to be **holy**; we're all called to be saints. Saints are role models for us. They're examples of the "poor in spirit" whose confidence is in God and who recognize their dependence on God. Jesus calls them "blessed" and promises that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Most of us won't be officially recognized by the Church as saints, but we are all called to choose God with our lives. In other words, we must be holy.

"Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."

St. Teresa of Calcutta

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How Does the Church Choose Saints?

Honoring saints has been part of Christianity from the very start. This practice came from the longstanding Jewish tradition of honoring prophets and holy people with shrines. Catholics honor Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as greatest among the saints. Many of the first saints were **martyrs**, people who were persecuted and died for their faith.

The pope and bishops oversee the process of **canonization**. The title "saint" tells us a person lived a holy life, is in heaven, and is to be honored by the universal Church. But canonization doesn't make a person a saint; it only recognizes what God has already done. While every canonized saint is holy, not every holy person has been canonized.

The canonization process begins after the death of a Catholic who is considered holy. His or her life is examined for heroic virtue or martyrdom, faithfulness to Church teaching, and reputation for holiness. There must be evidence of miracles after the candidate's death, resulting from a request to the saint for help. These miracles prove that the person is in heaven and can intercede for us.

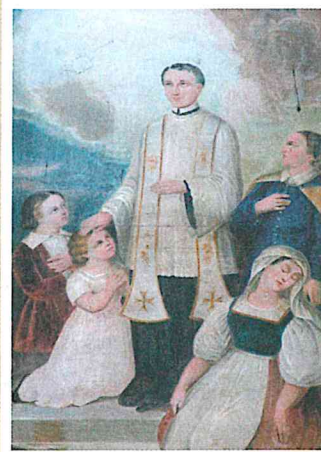
Isn't Having Images of Saints Idolatry?

Some people think the Catholic use of images and statues of saints is idolatry. But that's not how Catholics think of our devotion to saints. Saints serve as role models of faithful Christian living and intercede for us in prayer. We use images to remind us of their faithful example and their ongoing concern for us.

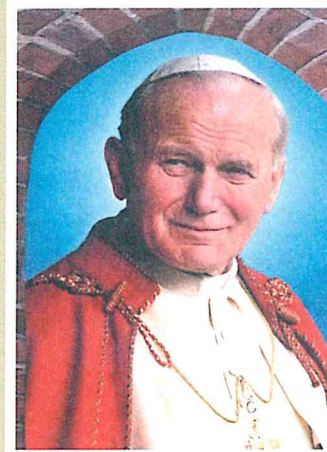
It's similar to how people keep pictures and mementos as reminders of loved ones, yet most don't worship the items or the individuals. Seeing a



St. Thérèse of Lisieux



St. John Bosco



St. John Paul II



St. Teresa of Calcutta

statue of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, whose mother died when Thérèse was a child, might help us feel less alone when we're grieving. A picture of St. Francis of Assisi might remind us of his love for God's creation and make us more aware of our environment.

Why Do Catholics Pray to Saints?

Catholics don't pray to saints as they pray to God. Only God is worthy of worship. One definition of prayer is "earnest petition." When Catholics pray to saints, they're asking the saints to pray for and with them—to God.

Have you ever asked anyone to pray for you? If so, the person was likely someone you trust, who understood your problem, or who was close to God. Those are all reasons to ask saints to pray for and with you in times of trouble.

Since saints led holy lives and are close to God in heaven, their prayers are particularly effective. Catholics often ask a specific saint to pray for

them if they feel he or she has a particular interest in their problem. For example, since St. Monica prayed for twenty years for her son to become a Christian, many people ask her to pray for them if they struggle to persevere in prayer. Saint Monica's prayers were eventually answered: Her son, Augustine, became a saint and a doctor of the Church.

"Do not weep for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life."

St. Dominic, dying, to his brothers

Communion of Saints

The Church is the body of Christ, united with one another and with Christ as its head. Also called the **communion of saints**, this assembly or communion includes all of God's holy ones—those in or on their way to heaven and those on earth who choose Christ with their lives.

"The communion of saints is the Church."

CCC 946



Do some research on the patron saint of your occupation, hobby, or nationality. Find a saint who shares your name or whose feast day is on your birthday. Learn about this saint—his or her life, vocation or career, good works, and close companions.

- Which saint did you choose?
- What do you find inspiring about this saint?

Guided Meditation

Sit quietly with a saint, perhaps one from this lesson.

Imagine yourself in a beautiful, peaceful setting. What do you see, hear, feel?

Picture a figure walking toward you. As the figure gets closer, you see it's the saint.

What does the saint look like? What is his or her mood or expression?

The saint asks, "What can I do to help?" Tell him or her something that troubles you.

What does the saint say in response?

Imagine the saint hands you a gift from God. What is it?

The two of you pray to God about your concern.

You feel the saint's ongoing love and support as you end your time together.

The Kingdom of God

If Joe chose God with his life, he'll enjoy eternal life in the kingdom of God. Humanity, the entire universe, and all creation will be redeemed—transformed in some marvelous manner to share in eternal life.

Waiting for this end shouldn't remove our motivation to improve this present world. On the contrary, faith and hope motivates us to serve others and work for the world's renewal here and now as a sign and beginning of its perfection through Christ (CCC 1049, 2820).

What are three things you can do now to prepare yourself for your particular judgment and the Final Judgment?



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Heaven and hell are our only possible eternal destinies.
- Purgatory is a purification in preparation for heaven.
- Each of us will undergo both a personal judgment and the Final Judgment.



Life, Death, and Particular Judgment

Joe began his journey of faith at baptism. During his life, Joe had opportunities to respond to God's offer of mercy and receive the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. At times, he gave in to the temptation of sin, but Joe tried to follow Christ faithfully. Joe said yes to God's offer of love and redemption. When Joe dies, he immediately faces God's judgment. This is called the "particular judgment" because it's given to each individual.

Through his particular judgment upon his death, Joe will either:

1. be granted immediate entrance into heaven;
2. be purified in purgatory before entering heaven;
3. be condemned to hell.

What if Joe Hadn't Heard the Gospel or Been Baptized?

God desires the salvation of everyone and provides for the salvation of the whole world through Christ's death and resurrection (the paschal mystery). When those who are ignorant of Christ respond to God's will, they're responding to Christ. God gives every person the opportunity to say yes to his mercy and salvation.

"The Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers...of the Paschal mystery. Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved." CCC 1260

Eschatology: The "Last Things"

Considering our own mortality and what happens after death can be unnerving, scary, and confusing. We only have slivers of understanding about what happens next. But as Christians, we find comfort and hope in our belief that Jesus has conquered death, granted us eternal life, and promised to come again in final triumph over evil. Church teaching on these "last things" is called eschatology.

Eschatology deals with what comes:

- at the end of a person's life.
- at the end of human history and creation.
- at the Second Coming of Christ.

Let's explore the life and afterlife of "Joe" all the way to the Second Coming. Joe's experiences will help us better understand the general eschatology of all humanity and creation.

"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

Luke 12:34

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Jesus revealed God’s great love for us. It’s how well Joe loved that will determine what happens at the end of his life. Did Joe repent, accept the love of God, and respond by loving God and others? Or did he refuse to do so?

Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory?

“Perfect love will make possible entrance into heaven, imperfect love will require purification, and a total lack of love will mean eternal separation from God.”

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 153

Heaven

If Joe dies “in God’s grace and friendship...perfectly purified,” his soul will go straight to heaven (CCC 1023). **Heaven** is a place of joy in communion with the Trinity, Mary, the angels, and all the blessed; “the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness” (CCC 1024).

Scripture uses many images to describe heaven—a heavenly city (Revelation 21:10), an eternal dwelling (2 Corinthians 5:1), a glorious wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1–14)—pointing toward supreme happiness that’s beyond human understanding.

- What do you imagine heaven will be like?



Hell

If Joe has rejected God’s love and mercy, he will end up in **hell**, which is “eternal separation from God” (CCC 1035). This is possible because God loves everyone, but he gives us **free will**, the freedom to receive or reject his love. Each individual has the choice of their ultimate destiny. Finally and definitively choosing to reject God leads to eternal separation from God in hell.

“God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willing turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end.”

CCC 1037

Purgatory

If Joe responds to God’s mercy but isn’t free from all attachments to sin, he can be “assured of...eternal salvation” but must go through “purification” after death to “achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (CCC 1030). This final purification is **purgatory**, which involves a “purifying fire” but is “entirely different from the punishment of the damned” (CCC 1031). How long this takes likely depends on how much purification Joe needs to be ready to meet God face to face in heaven.

Scripture encourages us to pray for the dead (see 2 Maccabees 12:44). The living members of the Church on earth, the saints in heaven, and the souls in purgatory are united as one Mystical Body in Christ, the communion of saints, and help one another through mutual prayer (CCC 954–959).

Praying for the Dead

Praying for our loved ones who have died can bring us comfort. Try praying this prayer for someone you love who has died:

Eternal rest grant unto [name] O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon [him/her]. And may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

The Second Coming of Christ

In the Nicene Creed, Catholics confess that Christ “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.” Having defeated evil by his death and resurrection and having ascended to heaven, Christ rules in glory as king. His kingdom is already present on earth as a seed; however, the Church on earth and all

of creation anticipate the perfection of Christ’s kingdom upon his return, when sin and death will be no more.

With a partner or as a group, look up ways that Jesus describes God’s kingdom in the Gospel of Matthew. Share what you find.

The kingdom of God is like...

Matthew 13:24–30	Matthew 13:31–32
Matthew 13:33	Matthew 13:44
Matthew 13:45–46	Matthew 13:47–50

- Based on these parables, what do you think the kingdom of God will be like?



What Is the Rapture?

Some Christians expect the **Second Coming** to occur in two phases:

1. a rapture (or catching up) of all Christians to heaven, followed by
2. a time of tribulation on earth until Christ finally comes again.

This is not the teaching of the Catholic Church. Scripture teaches that the living will meet the Lord “in the clouds” as he descends to earth. This catching up of the faithful and Christ’s Second Coming are not two distinct events but one (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). Some Christians also expect an earthly thousand-year reign of Christ after his Second Coming. This is based on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, which the Catholic Church rejects.

The Resurrection of the Body

In the Nicene Creed, we profess that we “look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” When Christ comes again, he will raise the dead. Joe’s soul will be reunited to his body, which will be miraculously transformed by God’s infinite power.

Christians believe that the power of death over humanity has been conquered by Jesus’ resurrection. Consequently, the human person (body and soul) will be restored for eternal life. We will live forever with God in some beautiful form that will never age, decay, or suffer. Christ’s transfiguration and post-resurrection appearances, as well as his presence in the Eucharist, give us a glimpse of this. Mary’s assumption, body and soul, into heaven upon her death serves as a promise of our future.

“Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.”

Matthew 17:1–2

- How do you envision your resurrected body? How does this change how you feel about your current body?



The Final Judgment

After the resurrection of the dead, “In the presence of Christ...the truth of man’s relationship with God will be laid bare” (CCC 1039). Joe’s particular judgment determines his eternal destiny and won’t change. In the **Final Judgment**, all our actions and their consequences will be known, and their ultimate meaning within the context of God’s saving work throughout the ages will be revealed to all. Christ will pronounce judgment on every evil act and reward every good deed with the honor it deserves (see John 5:21–29).