

Read 2 Corinthians 1:18–20 and Luke 14:28.
Reflect on your response to God’s call.



- How ready am I to say, “I’ve calculated the cost and am ready to follow Christ?”
- What is God asking of me today (possible sacrifices, costs of discipleship)?



In Short:



- Jesus invites us to say yes to his invitation to follow him.
- The Gospels report many different responses to Jesus’ invitation.
- Catechumens become the “elect” through the rite of election.



- As you approach Easter and initiation into the Christian community, it’s time to examine your life in relation to what Christ asks of you. Jesus has been calling you your entire life. How have you responded to that call?
- How will you continue to respond to Christ in new and deeper ways? Where is Jesus leading you?

Election: Saying Yes to Jesus

On the first Sunday of Lent, catechumens celebrate the rite of election and enter the period of purification and enlightenment, which leads to the celebration of the Easter sacraments. *Election* comes from a word that means “choose.” The ceremony reflects this theme: God has chosen and called us.

The Church community hears testimony from godparents and catechists about how the catechumens have responded to God’s call. The community accepts the catechumens, who state their desire to join the Church. They write their names in the *Book of the Elect* as one of “the chosen.”

Baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Catholic Church may celebrate a rite called the call to continuing conversion.

Many Are Called

Jesus invited many to become his disciples, carry on his mission, and follow the way of the cross. Some responded enthusiastically. Former disciples of John the Baptist, Galilean fishermen, tax collectors, people from every walk of life accepted his call and followed him.

But the Gospels record several incidents in which potential disciples refused to commit to Christ and let the opportunity slip away.

“I Will...but First...”

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke describe Jesus’ encounter with those who say they desire to follow Jesus but not quite yet: “Lord, let me go first and bury my father” (Matthew 8:21; Luke 9:59). In Jesus’ time, this meant, “Let me come after my father is dead.” And this didn’t necessarily mean the father was old or sick.

“I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.”

Luke 9:61



These people declared their willingness to follow Christ, but at their own convenience, on their own terms. To them, Jesus replied: "Let the dead bury their dead....No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60, 62).

Those who accept Jesus' call must do so promptly, enthusiastically, and completely. The Galilean fishermen "left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). The tax collector, "leaving everything behind... got up and followed him" (Luke 5:28).

When Jesus came to the house of Martha and Mary in Bethany, Mary "sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak" (Luke 10:39). Martha had other priorities and wanted Mary to help her, but Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her" (Luke 10:41–42).

- What is helping you become an "I will" disciple instead of a "would be" disciple?



"This Saying Is Hard..."

In chapter 6 of John's Gospel, Jesus foreshadows his institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist:

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

John 6:54–56

The disciples were shocked, saying: "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" (John 6:60). When Jesus refused to modify his claims, "many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him" (John 6:66). As long as Jesus' teaching matched their expectations, they were content to follow. When Jesus challenged their presuppositions rather than telling them what they wanted to hear, they left him.

- How do you respond when something Jesus says makes you uncomfortable?



Choose a part of Jesus' teaching you find difficult. With your leader's or sponsor's help, find a Gospel verse that reflects this teaching. Let Jesus guide you as you read the passage:

Read the passage as you slowly breathe in and out.

1. Imagine Jesus talking to you.
2. Let him gently lead you through the teaching and address your concerns.
3. Sit in Jesus' presence and listen for his loving response.

- What are your greatest fears or doubts regarding this matter? What do you find challenging?
- How does this passage enlighten your understanding? What is Jesus saying to you?
- What steps can you take to better accept this teaching?



In contrast, when Jesus asked the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter replied, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67–69). The faith of the Twelve enabled them to remain disciples of Christ while others retreated, scandalized and confused.

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, he said things that must have been hard to hear. Not only did he promise her living water that would keep her from thirsting but he told her that she and other Samaritans "worship what you do not understand" (John 4:22).

Most difficult of all, he laid bare her whole life. When she said she had no husband, Jesus said, "you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband" (John 4:18). She could have reacted with resentment or indignation to any of these "hard sayings." Instead, she ran to tell others that Jesus is the Messiah. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony: "He told me everything I have done" (John 4:39). Her faith, and theirs, was deepened by hearing the truth.

"He Went Away Sad..."

Perhaps the most poignant of Jesus' conversations was with a rich young man who asked:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?... All of these [commandments] I have observed from my youth.' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions."

Mark 10:17–22

Although the young man had observed all the commandments, his first allegiance was to his wealth. It gave him a sense of identity and security.

- What gives you a sense of identity and security? How attached are you to your possessions?



The rich young man didn't realize that true identity and security come from Christ. He wasn't sure that what he'd find in Christ would compensate for surrendering his possessions. So he left saddened.

In contrast, consider the generosity of the woman who "came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil.... and poured it on his head" (Mark 14:3). This perfume was worth "three hundred days' wages," yet that sacrifice didn't stop her. She gave generously out of love. For that reason, Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark 14:9).

"I Do Not Know Him..."

Probably the saddest loss for Jesus came after his arrest. Just when Jesus needed his closest friends the most, they ran away. Peter, who'd sworn he would die with Jesus, denied Jesus three times: "I do not know him" (Luke 22:57). John was the only one of the Twelve Apostles who attended Jesus' crucifixion and burial.

The women were faithful despite the danger: "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala" (John 19:25). "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb" (Matthew 27:61), watching as Jesus was buried. They returned later to anoint his body and were the first to see the resurrected Jesus, the first to carry the news of Easter to the world.

- When have you been uncomfortable about sharing your choice to follow Jesus? Why?
- When have you run from the cross?



Our Response to Jesus' Call

Our Lenten liturgies and penitential practices help us explore our own readiness to respond to Christ's call. There's probably a little bit of the would-be disciple in each of us—a part of ourselves that holds on to doubt, discouragement, or confusion in our relationship to God or Church. We may be tempted to seek our security beyond Christ and his love for us. Sometimes the demands of discipleship may seem too restrictive, inconvenient, uncomfortable, or unreasonable.

When we realize we've hesitated and want to turn back, it's time to remember all the disciples who ran away and then returned. Like Peter, we can turn from "I do not know him" to "Lord, you know that I love you" (John 21:15). But we must then accept the cost of discipleship as Peter did.

There's no question that it's difficult to give an unconditional "yes" to Christ, to embrace wholeheartedly the cross he asks us to carry. But if we ask the Lord to help us make that leap of faith, abandoning the pride, insecurity, selfishness, or apathy that can cripple discipleship, we'll respond ever more generously to him.

"Let your 'yes' mean 'yes.'"

Matthew 5:37

Offering up sacrifices during Lent is a reminder that all of our trials and suffering can be united with the suffering of Jesus and offered up in thanksgiving for his great sacrifice:

"If only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."

Romans 8:17

- How will I refocus my life on God this Lent?



When we give something up, our goal is to focus our attention on God and bring him and his concerns back to the center of our lives. Sometimes we discover we need to give something up; other times we may need to do something additional. Through our sacrifices and almsgiving (gifts of charity to the needy), we unite in solidarity with those who regularly do without.

"Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is a work of justice pleasing to God."

CCC 2462

"Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise."

Luke 3:11

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Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Lent was originally a period of preparation for baptism.
- Lenten themes include repentance, sacrifice, and spiritual growth.
- Three traditional Lenten practices are fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.



Living Lent

We take time to prepare for things that are important to us. During Lent, we prepare for the greatest celebration of the Church year—Easter. We follow the path of Jesus, who journeyed through death to resurrection. We die to ourselves so that we, like Jesus, might rise again.

Lent is a time of preparation, a time of spiritual growth. We discard our faulty attitudes and unhealthy habits. We pick up new attitudes and fresh perspectives. The dying and rebirth that take place within our hearts reflect the paschal mystery—the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord.

The word *Lent* comes from an early English word that refers to the lengthening of daylight hours during spring. While the season of Lent was originally a time of final preparation for those adults being baptized at Easter, the entire Church now enters into the spirit and practices of Lent.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending before the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, Lent is a period of about forty days, not counting Sundays. It's a penitential season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for the celebration of Easter. Sundays are excluded since they are days of joy as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

Lent is a good time to ask yourself:

- What do I need to be happy?
- How do I spend my time, energy, money? What does this tell me about my priorities?
- Do I have unhealthy habits that pull me away from God?

For catechumens and candidates, Lent is a time of *purification and enlightenment*, a time to respond to God with greater reflection and commitment.

Body, Mind, and Spirit

The season of Lent speaks to the whole person by appealing not only to the mind and spirit but also to the senses:

Ashes. The ashes we receive on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday remind us of the passage of time and our constant need of repentance. Wearing ashes on our foreheads indicates our willingness to do penance for our sins.

Violet. The color of the clergy's vestments and church decorations during Lent symbolizes repentance, reflection, and conversion.

Palms. On the Sunday before Easter, *Palm Sunday* of the Passion of the Lord, we carry palm branches in imitation of those who honored Jesus by throwing palm branches in his path as he rode into Jerusalem.

Our experience of Lent begins with ashes and words that call us to repentance. The symbols and practices of Lent assist us on our path of conversion. Lent prepares us to sing "Alleluia" to our risen Lord at Easter.

Why Forty Days?

The number forty has a symbolic meaning in Scripture and occurs in both the Old and New Testaments (see Genesis 7:17–18, Exodus 34:27–29, Deuteronomy 8:2–3, Matthew 4:1–4, Acts 1:1–5).

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that Jesus spent forty days in the desert after his baptism in the Jordan River: "Jesus...was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil" (Luke 4:1–2). The story of Jesus' temptation in the desert is always the Gospel reading on the first Sunday of Lent.

Jesus' desert experience reminds us of the Israelites who were freed from slavery in Egypt only to wander in the desert for forty years on their way to the Promised Land. During that time, they were tempted to sin and turned away from God.

Jesus reversed the Israelites' failure to stay faithful to God. When the devil tempted him, Jesus didn't give in. He resisted the devil's temptations, the same temptations the Israelites had faced in the desert.

- What tempts you to turn your heart away from God?



A Penitential Season

More than any other Church season, Lent focuses our attention on our human reality—our weaknesses and failings as well as our potential for doing good.

Historically, Lent was a time when people did public penance (prayers or actions that express sorrow for sin) to be reconciled with the Church. At the beginning of Lent, the bishop placed ashes on those seeking forgiveness and gave them a public penance to perform. Then at Easter, they were welcomed back to the Eucharist as fully reconciled members of the Church. Today, most parishes provide additional opportunities for celebrating the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

"My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn."

Psalm 51:19

Lenten practices that express our repentance are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

"Prayer for the good of the soul. Fasting for the good of the body. Almsgiving for the good of our neighbor."

Gertrude Mueller Nelson

Prayer

In a sense, Lent is a desert experience for each of us. It's a time to step away from the world and reflect in prayer. It's important to take time to reflect on how we're living our faith and prepare our hearts to hear God's voice so we may respond to his call. Turning our hearts toward God prepares us to take part in the celebration of Easter.

Lent is a time to refocus and strengthen our prayer efforts. If we've been lazy or inconsistent in prayer, Lent is a good time to commit to making a stronger and more regular effort. We may choose to lengthen the time we spend in prayer, try a different prayer form, read the daily Mass readings, pray the rosary or Way of the Cross, or attend daily Mass. Reading a spiritual book may help lead us to a richer prayer experience. Our improved prayer habits may spill over into the Easter season and beyond.

- How will you increase or improve your time in prayer this Lent?



Fasting

Fasting for religious purposes is a practice of self-discipline as old as the people of God (see 1 Samuel 7:5–16, 1 Kings 21:25–29, Joel 2:12–13, Acts 13:2–3, Acts 14:23). It's an aid to concentration in prayer and a help in refocusing our attention on God. Like other spiritual disciplines, fasting needs to be done in the right spirit and with an open heart.

The Church teaches that **fasting** (limiting the amount of food we eat) and **abstinence** (doing without certain foods) must be combined with prayer and works of charity and other acts of mercy:

"Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh?"

Isaiah 58:6–7

All Fridays of Lent are days of *abstinence* for those age fourteen and older. Most people abstain from eating meat, but other meaningful sacrifices may be substituted.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are required days of *fasting and abstinence* for those between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine. When *fasting*, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together don't equal a full meal. A person's age, health condition, and degree of physical labor will affect how strictly they're obliged to fast.

"When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting."

Matthew 6:17–18

- What value do you see in fasting and abstaining from meat? How much of a sacrifice will this be for you?



- How might fasting and abstinence make you more conscious of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice for our sins? More conscious of those who regularly do without?

Sacrifice and Almsgiving

Our prayer and fasting should lead to sacrifice and **almsgiving** (money or goods given as charity to the poor) and other acts of mercy.

What Jesus Says About Sacrifice

Jesus requires his disciples to make sacrifices in order to follow him:

- Matthew 19:21: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."
- Mark 8:34: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."
- Luke 14:27, 33: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.... Everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

- What is your cross? Will you carry your cross halfheartedly or wholeheartedly?



Members of the early Christian community in Jerusalem gave up ownership of their goods to support the community:

"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need."

Acts 2:44–45

Conversion—our turning to God—happens continuously. We stumble and fall—we sin by failing to keep God first in our lives—but we can get back up and try again thanks to Christ's redeeming love. God eagerly awaits our return, forgives us, and offers us another chance.

- What must die in you so that Christ's new life may take root in you?



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- God's mercy is continuously offered freely and to all.
- The scrutinies are rites for self-searching and repentance.
- A daily examen of consciousness helps us move closer to Christ.



Scrutinies: Looking Within

We're all familiar with regret. You may regret having that piece of pie at lunch, letting a friendship fade away, or not spending enough time with your family. Though regretful, these actions aren't necessarily sinful.

Most of us will regret and feel guilty for the ways we intentionally hurt others and turned away from God through our sinful actions and attitudes. When we sin, we feel the weight of our guilt. We may feel it physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The good news is that we may find ways to express sorrow for the hurt, undo some of the harm we've caused, and get back into right relationship with God, others, and ourselves.

Even better, as we turn back toward God, we discover that God is always turned toward us—with arms outstretched and a heart full of love and mercy, eager to forgive.

- What regrets do you have about hurts you've intentionally caused? How do you feel about yourself as a result?



Called to Conversion

Each test or trial we encounter serves as an opportunity to turn toward, or away from, God. The word **conversion** comes from the Latin for "a turning, overturning, turning around; turning point; change." In spiritual terms, conversion is the ongoing response of our whole person turning in faith and love to the God who loves us.

The first and fundamental conversion occurs at baptism, for "It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life" (CCC 1427).

Many people connect conversion with moral change and the decision to choose right over wrong, good over evil. But morality and law don't save. God saves. Grace saves. The free gift of God's love and mercy makes true morality—choosing to follow God's will out of love, not fear—possible.

"Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.'"

CCC 1427, citing Mark 1:15

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What Are the Scrutinies?

When we scrutinize something, we look at it carefully and examine it thoroughly. The rites called the *scrutinies* "are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good" (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 141). The elect look within themselves to find anything that keeps them from Christ. Then they look to Christ to heal those weaknesses and strengthen them when they face temptation.

Three scrutinies for the elect occur on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. (A penitential rite, a type of scrutiny, may be offered for baptized candidates for full communion on or near the second Sunday of Lent.)

Following instruction on the mystery of sin during the catechumenate, the Church invites the elect to reflect on three Gospel stories that reveal the meaning of their upcoming baptism.

First Scrutiny

Christ as Living Water

In the Gospel story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at a well (John 4:5–42), Jesus speaks to her of *living water*:

"Jesus...said to her, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

John 4:13–14

- How do Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman relate to your upcoming baptism?

- Imagine a spring of water welling up, bubbling up, inside you. What feeling do you connect to this experience?

- How thirsty are you for Christ's living water? What dryness in your life do you hope it will quench?

Second Scrutiny

Christ as the Light of the World

In the Gospel story of Jesus healing a man who was born blind (John 9:1–41), Jesus refers to himself as the *light of the world*:

"'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When [Jesus] had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on [the blind man's] eyes, and said to him, 'Go wash in the Pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see.'"

John 9:5–7

- When have you been "blind" or unwilling to see the light of Christ? What had your attention or prevented you from seeing?
- Who or what has helped you gain new vision and ability to recognize Christ as the light?
- What blindness (sin) do you want your upcoming baptism to wash away?

Third Scrutiny

Christ as the Resurrection and the Life

In the Gospel story of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus back to life (John 11:1–45), Jesus calls himself the *resurrection and the life*:

"Jesus said to [Martha], 'Your brother will rise.' Martha said to him, 'I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus told her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'"

John 11:23–26

- The waters of baptism are waters of new life in Christ. What does the promise of salvation, eternal life with God, mean to you?

- How has your life been changing throughout your preparation for baptism?

- How do you expect your life to be different once you have been baptized?

Steps of the Scrutinies

1. After the homily, the elect and their godparents stand before the celebrant.
2. The assembly of the faithful prays in silence, asking that "the elect will be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin, and the true freedom of the children of God" (RCIA 152).
3. The celebrant (priest or deacon) invites the elect to pray in silence and may suggest they bow their heads or kneel as "a sign of their inner spirit of repentance" (RCIA 152).
4. He offers prayers of intercession for the elect.
5. He offers a prayer that the elect be "freed from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil" (RCIA 144).
6. He may lay hands on the head of each of the elect.
7. He makes a final prayer for all the elect with his hands outstretched over them.
8. He either dismisses them to reflect on the Scripture readings or invites them to return to their seats for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

"The scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them from temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should...deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all."

RCIA 141

Praying the Examen

Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) was a very practical man when it came to prayer. He proposed a daily exercise, which he called the Examen (or Examen of Consciousness), that has been used by many Christians ever since. The Examen is a simple prayer, a prayer for busy people who are continually seeking to do the Lord's will.

There are five simple steps to the Examen, which should take about fifteen minutes to complete:

1. *Recall you are in the presence of God.* In prayer, we place ourselves in God's presence in an especially attentive way. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you look at your life with love this day.
2. *Look at your day with gratitude.* Move through the details of your day in gratitude, remembering that every single event has been God's gift. Take care to notice what you received and what you gave. Thank God for all of these.
3. *Ask help from the Holy Spirit.* Ask for the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and help you look at your actions clearly and with an understanding of your limitations.
4. *Review your day.* Be sure to notice the details, the context of what happened, and how you acted. As you look through the day, notice especially your interior motives and feelings: *When did you fail? When did you love? What patterns and habits do you see? When did you respond positively? Where did you see signs of God's grace in your day?*
5. *Reconcile and resolve.* Talk with Jesus about what you did and what you didn't do. If you failed to love in some way, tell Jesus you're sorry and ask him to be with you the next time the same sort of situation arises. Remember all the good things and thank the Lord for being with you when you avoided a wrong choice or resisted temptation. Feel the sorrow when you apologize, but also feel the gratitude when you give thanks for God's work inside your heart as he labors daily to make you more Christlike.

End the Examen by praying the Our Father.

The Nicene Creed

*I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.*

*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.*

*I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*



Select several statements from the Creed. Transform each belief into a challenge to action. For example:

- *I believe in the Father almighty...so I will obey his commandments.*
- *I believe in the maker of heaven and earth...so I will care for nature and the environment by...*
- *I believe the Son rose again on the third day...so I will attend Sunday worship.*
- *I believe in the resurrection of the dead...so I will visit the cemetery/grave of...*

Post them in your home where you'll encounter them regularly.

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The Creed is a statement of core beliefs of the faith community.
- The Creed expresses belief in the persons of the Trinity and the Church.
- We are called to share our beliefs and put them into action.



The Creed

Christians believe God is active in our daily lives and loves each of us as if we were his only creation. We also live as a community united in our belief in one God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. As one body—the Church—we join together in faith to read and receive the word, to worship and pray, and to build up the kingdom. We share a way of life, learning to love as Jesus did through the power of the Spirit.

Our communal faith is embodied in the statement of our beliefs: the Creed. After the First Scrutiny, usually during the third week of Lent, you may experience this sense of communal faith in a rite during which you are presented with a copy of the Creed.

Praying With the Church

The Nicene Creed is the basis of the profession of faith new Christians express at their baptism. The words were formulated at the First Council of Nicaea in 325. They summarize our beliefs as passed down, proclaimed, and practiced from the earliest days of the Church. Its principal statements provide an outline of the essential doctrines of the Catholic faith. The Nicene Creed, or the Apostles' Creed on which it's based, is used as the profession of faith of all the faithful at Sunday Mass.

- Many popular song lyrics and titles include the phrase "I believe." If you wrote a song with that title, how would the lyrics read?



Breaking It Down

*I believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all things
visible and invisible.*

Knowing we're loved radically changes our lives. So it is with faith in God. There's a deep hunger within each of us, a space only God can fill. We believe we're created in God's image. When we see the world through God's eyes, we find it "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

What do these passages reveal about God?

Deuteronomy 26:5–9

Isaiah 49:15–16

Jeremiah 31:3

Luke 15

Romans 8:38–39

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I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

These words speak to the mystery of the Trinity. The word **consubstantial** means the Father and the Son are of the same nature and "substance." Christ was **begotten** and possesses the Father's divine nature, just as a child contains his or her biological parents' genetic makeup. Jesus doesn't just tell us about God. He shows us God; he *is* God.

God revealed divine love to us in the Son. Miraculously conceived by the Spirit, Jesus was formed in Mary's womb and had a body and soul like ours. While divine, he also shared in our human characteristics and feelings.

These passages describe a feeling or human characteristic of Jesus. *Select one* and reflect on its meaning in your journal.

Jesus was...

tempted: Matthew 4:1–11

compassionate: Matthew 9:36

angry: Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 3:5

loving: Mark 10:21

upset: Mark 14:32–42

troubled: John 11:33

sad: John 11:35–36

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

God's love is the only power capable of overcoming sin. Jesus invites us to be united with him, turn away from sin, and rise to new life. If Jesus hadn't risen, our faith would be futile and we'd still be enslaved by sin (1 Corinthians 15:17). But Jesus *did* rise. After dying on the cross, he was buried in a sealed and guarded tomb. When women came to anoint his body, the tomb was empty. For forty days, Jesus appeared to his followers, assuring them he had risen.

Jesus passed through death, his human body was transformed into a glorified body, and he will come again in glory. We don't know *how* the world will end. What's important is to be prepared to meet Jesus.

Select an account of Jesus performing a miracle from the list below. Reflect on its message and meaning using the questions that follow.

Healing of a centurion's servant: Matthew 8:5–13

Feeding of the five thousand: Mark 6:34–44

Miraculous catch of fish: Luke 5:1–11

Healing of a paralytic: Luke 5:17–26

Changing water into wine: John 2:1–11

Walking on water: John 6:16–21

- How did the person(s) feel before and after encountering Jesus?

- How might you have felt? What might you have done?

- What areas of your life need healing or liberating?

- How do you expect to feel upon receiving the Easter sacraments?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

Catholics understand the Spirit as the love eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. The Spirit is the source of our life, the cause of all that's good in the world. We also believe Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Covenant laws and words of the prophets.

- How is the Holy Spirit transforming your life?

- How is the Spirit at work in your community, parish, nation, and world?

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Church is *one*. Christ wants all his followers to be united in him (John 17:21).

The Church is *holy*. We share in the holiness of God through baptism and are called to reject sin and cooperate with the grace of the sacraments.

The Church is *catholic*. This word means "universal" or "whole" and refers to the Christian body throughout the world.

The Church is **apostolic**, tracing its authority and teachings back to Jesus through the apostles. Jesus commissioned them to preach to the world, and we, the Church, are sent every day to share the good news and evangelize.

We confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. In baptism, we die to sin and start a new life in Christ. Baptism removes the corruption of original sin, forgives personal sins, and gives us the strength to overcome temptation (CCC 978).

Our bodies will wear out, but physical death isn't the end. With Jesus, we'll be fully alive in a new world surpassing anything on earth. We don't know how this will happen, but Jesus leaves no doubt about the reality of heaven (John 6:40) and the glory awaiting the faithful.

Amen.

Amen means "yes" or "so be it." We say "yes" to the Father, Son, and Spirit, the promise of eternal life, and the goodness of life in the Church.

Loving Christ, you gave everything for me, and I withhold so much. Show me how to live the demands of love more fully so that I might become a true disciple. Help me to understand that by your death you show me how to die and rise each day. Amen.

XIII. Jesus Is Taken From the Cross

"[Joseph] came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus."

Luke 23:51–52

Jesus, you teach us to trust in you, even when everything seems hopeless. After your death, the few friends near the cross didn't run away even though they were shaken. They reacted courageously and demanded your broken body for burial.

Loving Christ, I am often weak in my faith as I see suffering and death in the world. Teach me that loss and grief can be vehicles of redemption and growth. Help me to transcend the darkness and bring the light of justice, peace, and love to others. Amen.

XIV. Jesus Is Buried in the Tomb

"After [Joseph] had taken [Jesus'] body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb."

Luke 23:53

Jesus, since it was almost time for Passover, your broken body was hurriedly wrapped in a shroud, rushed to the tomb, and left on a stone slab. Hurrying to bury you before the start of the Jewish Passover, no one took time to clean and anoint your body.

Loving Christ, help me remember the oppressed and forgotten. Help me to not ignore or hurry past those in need. Show me how to love as you have loved me. Amen.

- When have I run from burdens and problems? When have I turned to something other than God as a refuge?
- When have I been tempted to abandon my Lord because of my own frustration or failures?
- Why have I refused to give Jesus my love as completely as he has given his to me?

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Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Following Jesus involves carrying the cross of self-denial and sacrifice.
- The Way of the Cross helps us reflect on the Jesus' cross and our own.
- Traditionally, fourteen stations mark the path of Jesus' passion and death.



The Way of the Cross

Following Jesus involves more than going to Mass every week and being kind to others. To follow Jesus, we must follow the way of the cross.

What does this mean? We learn from Jesus' example that carrying our crosses as his disciples means self-denial and sacrifice. A prayer that helps us enter into this experience is the Way of the Cross (also Stations of the Cross). Fourteen scenes or crosses remind us of the steps Jesus took on his way to his death. We prayerfully walk from station to station and reflect on Christ's passion and death.

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

Matthew 16:24

"Christian prayer loves to follow the way of the cross in the Savior's steps. The stations... trace the way of Jesus, who by his holy Cross has redeemed the world."

CCC 2669

I. Jesus Is Condemned to Death

"[The crowd] only shouted the louder, 'Crucify him.' So Pilate...released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified."

Mark 15:14–15

Jesus, you faced those who judged and condemned you and felt only love for them. You struggled with fear but continued your mission. You cherished your humanity and your divinity.

Loving Christ, sometimes I lash out to cover my own fears. Show me how to accept myself as a person in the process of growth, painfully struggling to become the person you want me to be. Amen.

II. Jesus Bears His Cross

"Carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull."

John 19:17

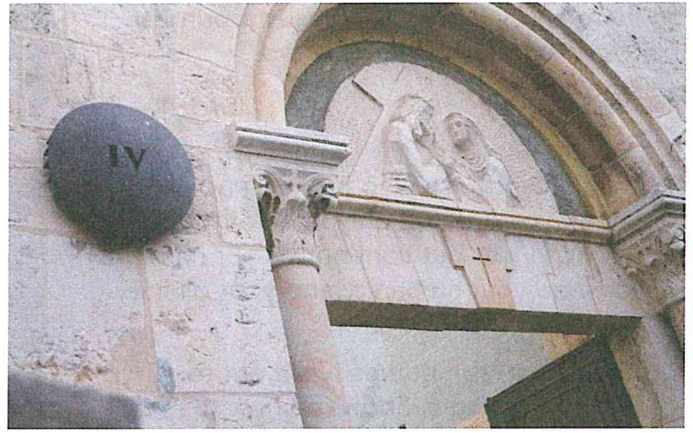
Jesus, you willingly accepted your cross. We value power, but you became powerless. We strive for status and control, but you gave yours away. You continued on despite your burden, while we often give up in our daily struggles.

Loving Christ, I often become discouraged with life. I avoid responsibility for my thoughts, feelings, and actions. Teach me to surrender myself, to be generous with my time, talents, and treasures. Amen.

III. Jesus Falls the First Time

Jesus, the burden of the cross was too great. You fell to the dust but pulled yourself up again. Exhausted and suffering, you shouldered your burden while we sometimes force our crosses on others. You continued to move to your destination while we invent excuses to give up our struggles, to abandon our call to follow you.

Loving Christ, I often fail in my struggle to follow you. Show me how to forgive myself. Sometimes I give up hope, lose faith, and refuse to persevere. Your example speaks to me, encouraging me to carry my own cross on my journey back to you. Amen.



IV. Jesus Meets His Mother

Though the Gospels don't record Jesus meeting his mother as he carried the cross, we know she was there at the crucifixion.

Jesus, you showed us we can't shield those we love from pain. You experienced your mother's anguish as she watched you. You gazed with compassion on her pain-filled face.

Loving Christ, teach me to be compassionate to others who are hurting. Teach me to be considerate and loving, as you were to your mother and she was to you. Give me strength to express my feelings of love. Amen.

V. Jesus Is Helped by Simon



Jesus, you shared your burden with Simon, showing that we all need help at times.

Loving Christ, inspire me to come forward, step out of the crowd, and acknowledge you. I'm often asked to help, care, or serve, but I refuse. Sometimes I'm offered help, but I don't accept it. Help me say "yes" to helping others and to letting others help me, too. Amen.

VI. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

According to tradition, a woman came forward from the crowd to wipe the sweat and blood from Jesus' face. The likeness of Jesus' face appeared on the veil she used.

Jesus, what courage it must have taken for Veronica to defy the soldiers and offer you comfort!

Loving Christ, at times my faith is weak, and I'm reluctant to be "Christ" for others and to share the message of your salvation. Help me to act and speak in spite of fear or embarrassment. Give me the grace to be more like you, for the sake of others. Amen.

VII. Jesus Falls a Second Time

Jesus, you showed us how to accept human limitations in ourselves and in others. Climbing with your heavy burden, your body gave out once more. You showed us that it's only natural to fail sometimes. You revealed empathy for our struggles to persevere.

Loving Christ, teach me to focus on what you want me to be instead of trying to control others. Help me to stretch out my hand to those who fall and help them up as we journey together in faith, hope, and love. Amen.

VIII. Jesus Speaks to the Women

"Jesus turned to [the women] and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children.'"

Luke 23:28

Jesus, you told the women to weep over their own oppression. You embraced the powerless and healed the brokenhearted.

Loving Christ, teach me to love mercy and act justly. Help me to appreciate all who touch my life and to bring healing to areas of brokenness wherever I encounter it. Amen.

IX. Jesus Falls a Third Time



Jesus, the burden you carried overpowered you once more, and your body crumpled. With your failing strength, you pulled yourself up again.

Loving Christ, in your weakness you showed me strength. Teach me that it doesn't matter how often I fall along my journey. What counts is that I get up and start again. Help me to trust you to help me become the person I was meant to be. Amen.

X. Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

"They took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier."

John 19:23

Jesus, you endured the humiliation of being stripped of your clothes. As you stood before the scorn-filled crowd, you gave yourself completely, without reservation.

Loving Christ, teach me to be open and honest in my relationships. Teach me humility. Show me how to become vulnerable because only then will I be able to love. Amen.

XI. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

"There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle."

John 19:18

Jesus, you showed us that we will be pierced many times in this life. With each blow of the hammer, the burning metal penetrated deeper into your flesh. You endured the agony of crucifixion for love.

Loving Christ, help me to not crucify others by my words, acts, or omissions. Teach me to let go of negative behavior and transform my vices into virtues. Teach me to build up your body instead of tearing it apart. Amen.

XII. Jesus Dies on the Cross

"Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'; and...he breathed his last."

Luke 23:46

Jesus, you showed us how to give life and love through your sacrifice. As the weight of your body forced air from your lungs, you thought of us. You asked God to forgive our ignorance and sin.

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.*



Saint Paul wrote, "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it."

1 Corinthians 10:13

- When have I faced a season of suffering?
- How am I being challenged to trust God now?

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Jesus invites us to call God, our Father, our Abba.
- The Lord's Prayer is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples.
- The Lord's Prayer is also known as the Our Father.



Our Father, who art in heaven...

Jesus spoke of God as Abba. To refer to God by the familiar title Abba was unheard of in Jewish custom. Abba was an intimate name given by children to their father. When Jesus addressed his Father as Abba, he was essentially saying "Daddy." By inviting us to call God Abba, Jesus reveals to us that we too have a special relationship with God as God's children.

Prayer Suggestions

Imagine God like a loving parent holding you close, telling you how deeply you're loved. As a child rests in the arms of Dad or Mom, relax in the embrace of your loving God.

The psalms tell us why we should praise God. God "is gracious and merciful" and "near to all who call upon him" for help (145:8, 18). God is one who "gives bread to the hungry" (146:7), "healing the brokenhearted, and binding up their wounds" (147:3).

- How have you experienced the qualities of divine love in your life?



The Lord's Prayer

In the Gospels, Jesus provides specific instructions for how to pray. According to Jesus' teaching, the most important aspect is the disposition of our hearts.

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Matthew 6:5-6

During the time of Jesus, the devout Jew prayed in public at set times of the day. Jesus makes the point that we shouldn't pray merely to impress others.

"One of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray'" (Luke 11:1). The Lord's Prayer was Jesus' response to his disciple's request.

In the words Jesus taught us, we pray:

Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come...

These first petitions reflect our hope and expectation for the kingdom of God to be made fully manifest and present.

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."

Mark 16:15

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- What specific gift is Jesus inviting you to use in building the kingdom of God? What is your specific mission? Spend time sharing with Jesus your response to his invitation.
- List the names of people who serve God's kingdom in the world today. What do you admire most about them? Thank God for the virtues you see in them. Decide what you can do to become more Christlike in your own attitudes. Pray for the courage to take the first step.



Slowly read the following Scripture passage:

"Do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?'... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides."

Matthew 6:31–33

Anxiety and worry preoccupy us and drain our energy. They prevent the Spirit of God from freeing us to live the Christian life in a vibrant and victorious way.

- What worries keep you from seeking first the kingdom of God in your life?



Give God each of these worries and ask him to help you set your heart on the kingdom first, knowing that he will care for all the things that trouble or worry you.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus came to reveal the depths of God's boundless love. We pray that, like Jesus, God's will may be done in all we say and do.

Look back over your life. Can you see how your joys, sufferings, and failures are connected to your relationship with God and forming who you are? Can you thank God for the good and beg forgiveness for the bad? Can you say, "For all that has been: I give you thanks, my God! For all that your will holds for me, I give you my full 'yes?'"

- What changes do you need to make in your life to bring it into conformity with God's will? What are the obstacles to doing God's will?
- Think of events that happened to you during the past day, week, and month that really touched your heart and reminded you of God's presence.
- How do these experiences reflect God's will in your life?



Give us this day our daily bread;

According to some biblical scholars, this phrase responds to Jesus calling us to trust him to take care of our needs. Catholics especially profess that Christ himself is our bread of eternal life; he is our "food for the journey."

Prayer Suggestions

Spend some time bringing your needs to God. Picture Christ holding you and your intentions in his heart. As you pray, lift up the needs of the world, the nation, and the Church, as well as your personal intentions.

Christ satisfies our spiritual hunger with the gifts of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Receiving holy Communion transforms us into new reflections of the Body of Christ. Jesus is present in the world through our presence to our sisters and brothers.

- How can you make Jesus present in the world through your presence to others?



Did you know that the pope chooses special intentions every month and that the Church is invited to join him in praying for these intentions? Find out what the Holy Father's intentions are for this month.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;

In this phrase, we acknowledge that we're sinners and also recognize God's great love and mercy. We believe God truly forgives our sins when we seek forgiveness and are willing to forgive the offenses of others. Jesus clearly laid down this latter condition for our forgiveness:

"If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

Matthew 6:14–15

Sometimes, forgiveness is a process that begins with an intention or desire to forgive and only later results in deep healing. Be patient with the process and continue to trust in your ability to forgive through the power of God's merciful love within you.

Contact someone you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from. Invite him or her to meet you for coffee or a meal or to do something you used to enjoy doing together. Keep it light. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to a new place in this relationship.

If reaching out to this person is difficult, prepare yourself by:

- Playing some classical or religious music.
- Taking time to relax and quiet yourself.
- Getting in touch with any feelings related to this person or transgression, turning each one over to God.

- Visualizing God as a bright light radiating warmth, compassion, and justice into your heart. Allow the light to expand and surround the person or people affected.
- Asking God to take from you any impediment to reconciliation.
- Taking this person or situation to a trusted confessor or spiritual director.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

It's easy for us to get lost, fail, or slip into a sudden weakness. When we're empty and aware of our sins, weaknesses, and failures, God can fill, heal, and deliver us.

Prayer Suggestion

Light a candle to represent the light of Christ. Pray that God's power may free you from sinful tendencies. As you pray, imagine the light of God's glory filling the dark areas within you, transforming you into a radiant reflection of God's love to others.

Recite the following prayer over and over, mentioning the areas of weakness (examples: pride, stubbornness, fears, anger, need for control, sexual sins, refusal to trust) from which you most need to be set free:

"Come, Lord Jesus, shine the light of our glory on... Oh, Lord, heal and restore me. Set me on my feet again to live the life of grace you had in mind for me when you created me. Amen."

The peace that Jesus offers his followers is his own peace, which flows from his intimate communion with the Father. It doesn't leave us in times of poverty, suffering, oppression, temptation, or illness. Jesus carries us, lifts us into the arms of our Abba, where we encounter the love and peace that surpass all understanding and that sustain us.

- When and how has Jesus lifted you up?





Read one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection: Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; or John 20:1–18.

Imagine you're weary and grief-stricken following Jesus' suffering and death. Now you see the empty tomb, the rock that's been rolled away, the wrappings, the angel. Hear the angel announce, "He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.... Go quickly and tell his disciples" (Matthew 28:6–7).

This message is for us today, too. We are called to be messengers of the good news of Jesus Christ.

- *What good news can I share with others about this life of grace and mercy in following the Lord?*
- *How will I deliver the message in words, in actions, in prayer?*

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- During Holy Week, we follow the events of Jesus' passion through his resurrection.
- Palm Sunday and the Easter Triduum mark the main events of Holy Week.
- Jesus entrusts us with sharing the good news of his resurrection with others.



After hearing this story from one of the Gospels, we take up our own palms and sing a hymn in honor of Christ our king as we process into the church. But the story isn't over. Later, we hear the story of the passion of Jesus. The same people who welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem ask for his crucifixion less than a week later. We reflect on the fickleness of human nature and our own weakness.

A Prayer of Welcoming

Read one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem: Matthew 21:1–11, Mark 11:1–10, or Luke 19:28–40.

Now imagine the scene as if you're there. Hear the sounds of the crowd. See the crowd around you, the palms on the path. Watch Jesus riding on the colt of an ass. Imagine you're laying down palms and welcoming Jesus. What else could you do to make Jesus feel honored, respected, and welcomed? We all long to feel welcomed and accepted. When we welcome others, God's welcome to us is passed on.

Remember an opportunity you had recently to welcome someone. It may have been someone who sat next to you in church, someone new at work, someone you just met.

- *What did you do to help this person feel welcomed and accepted?*



The Meaning of Holy Week

During Holy Week, we enter into Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. We not only commemorate the important events of our salvation in a historical way but we also celebrate them in a sacramental way that makes these sacred mysteries present to us.

Palm Sunday

Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, the Sunday before Easter. This liturgy recalls Jesus' dramatic arrival at Jerusalem. He came humbly, yet the people greeted him by laying cloaks and palm branches on his path and acclaiming him as the Son of David, and, therefore, heir to the kingdom.



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The Easter Triduum

Triduum means a “three-day festival.” The Easter Triduum is three days of prayer and worship beginning on Holy Thursday evening and ending with vespers (Evening Prayer) on Easter.

Holy Thursday

Holy Thursday is the feast day of the institution of the priesthood and of the Eucharist.

Chrism Mass. In the morning, in cathedrals around the world, priests and people gather with their bishops for the great chrism Mass. The priests renew their commitment to priestly service, and the people are asked to pray for them.

The three oils used in the Church are blessed by the bishops on Holy Thursday: the *oil of chrism* used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and holy orders; the *oil of catechumens* used in the baptism of children and with adults preparing for baptism; the *oil of the sick* used in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

The Mass of the Lord’s Supper. The Triduum begins with the evening Mass, which celebrates the institution of the holy Eucharist. After the reading of Jesus’ command to serve others as he has served, the celebrant washes the feet of twelve people, representing the twelve apostles whose feet Jesus washed at the Last Supper (see John 13:1–15). At the end of Mass, the priest takes the Blessed Sacrament from the main tabernacle to a separate altar of repose.

Model of Service

Read John 13:1–15. Imagine the scene as if you’re there. Imagine Jesus washing your feet: Feel the water on your feet and the towel Jesus uses to dry them. Look at him, bent low in service. He looks up at you and your eyes meet. *How do you feel about Jesus washing your feet?*

Jesus says to you:

“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 God asking you to “wash feet” in your life?



Good Friday

The central act of worship on this day is the celebration of the passion of the Lord, which has three key parts:

1. **Liturgy of the Word:** We hear the story of the passion from John’s Gospel and pray for the Church and the world.
2. **Adoration of the Cross:** We approach the cross with a sign of reverence for this symbol of our salvation, this sign of God’s love for us. We reverence the cross because we adore Christ and we thank him for his perfect sacrifice on the cross.
3. **Holy Communion:** Good Friday is the only day in the Church year when Mass isn’t offered, but holy Communion reserved from the Mass on Holy Thursday is distributed.

Through Christ’s victory over the cross, he offers us everlasting life. During the Good Friday service, the celebrant reminds the assembly three times, “Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world” to which we respond, “Come, let us adore.”

A day of abstinence and fasting on which the altar is bare, crosses in the church are covered or removed, and the service ends in silence, Good Friday may be seen by some as dreary and uncomfortable, something to quickly pass over on the way to Easter. But Good Friday can’t be skipped over. We must pass through Jesus’ death and ponder what it means for us.

At the Foot of the Cross

Imagine standing at the foot of the cross. Take time to visualize Jesus’ physical agony. Be aware of your feelings as you witness his sufferings. *What do you want to say to him?*

Listen as Jesus speaks his healing words of forgiveness: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Allow his forgiveness to touch you. Ask Jesus to help you see with his eyes and forgive others as he has forgiven you.

- Who do you still need to forgive? Picture yourself laying the burden of your anger and hurt at the foot of the cross.



Holy Saturday

During the day, the Church is silent, the altars are bare. The tabernacle is empty. We wait in silence at the tomb for the Lord’s resurrection. We prepare for the Easter sacraments by prayer, reflection, and optional fasting.

After sunset, the Church explodes in joy and celebration of Jesus’ resurrection. “This is the night when Christ broke the prison-bars of death,” proclaims the Church in the Proclamation of Easter (*Exsultet*). And what a night it is! This is a night when the whole parish and Church come together.

Having attended the Good Friday service, we gather again for the Easter Vigil so that we may experience the complete message of our faith: the assurance that death and sin have been conquered.

The vigil begins at the door of the church where *new fire* is kindled. The priest blesses the new *paschal candle* and lights it from the Easter fire. He or a deacon holds the candle high and carries it into the darkened church, proclaiming “The Light of Christ” to which we respond, “Thanks be to God.”

Gradually the light of Christ dispels the darkness. From the paschal candle, other candles are lit until the light fills the church.

The *Liturgy of the Word* leads us to reflect on God’s faithful love throughout salvation history. Up to seven *Old Testament readings* are proclaimed, with *psalms* interspersed. We listen to the *epistle* from Romans in which St. Paul writes about our being buried with Jesus Christ “through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (6:4). We sing the “Alleluia” for the first time since Lent began. The *Gospel* and *homily* follow.

Catechumens are called forth for *baptism*. We pray a *Litany of the Saints*. The priest *blesses the water*. Adults and children are baptized, clothed in white garments, and given lighted candles. The assembly renews their baptismal vows.

Candidates for full communion make a *profession of faith*. They join the newly baptized for *confirmation* and later receive the *Eucharist* for the first time.

As with every Mass, we are *sent forth* to be Christ’s body in the world. The Mass ends, but the journey of new Catholics has just begun.

Easter

Easter morning follows. New life and fresh hope have come in the risen Christ. We celebrate with a renewal of baptismal promises to reject sin and evil, love God, and follow Jesus.

Easter is such a significant feast that the celebration continues for fifty days. The joyful music, the elegance and fragrance of lilies, and life in Christ, new or renewed, continues until Pentecost...and beyond.

Epistle: Romans 6:3–11

“We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”

Romans 6:4

- In baptism, we die with Christ. It’s natural to be afraid of loss. What fears do you have about changes this step will make in your life?
- In baptism, we’re raised with Christ. What hopes do you have about your future in the Church?



Gospel:

Year A, Matthew 28:1–10;
Year B, Mark 16:1–7;
Year C, Luke 24:1–12

“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.”

Mark 16:6

- Reflect on the miracle of Christ’s resurrection, Christ’s promise to you, and Christ’s presence in your life.



Closing Prayer

Lord, you are the resurrection and the life. We have journeyed from darkness to light, from being alone to belonging, from doubt to faith. Guide us on the next step of our journey to make a commitment—a covenant with the living God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



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Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The journey of faith involves growing in love of God and his Church.
- The Scripture readings from the Easter Vigil help us reflect on our faith journeys.
- Initiation into the Church is the beginning of full membership and ongoing formation.



First Reading: Genesis 1:1—2:2

“God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.”

Genesis 1:31

Spend some time walking outside by yourself. Become aware of God’s presence in creation all around you. When an object or scene catches your eye, ask God what he’s trying to reveal to you. For example, a plant growing through a cracked stone or sidewalk might remind you that faith can grow even in tough times. A seedpod may represent the need for patience in your spiritual growth. A sturdy oak may show how faith can grow in strength. Weeds may represent things that distract our focus on God.

If walking outside isn’t possible, imagine walking in a park, looking at everything around you until you see something that reminds you of God. When an object or scene catches your eye, ask God what he’s trying to reveal to you.

- What do you learn about God from reflecting on his creation of the natural world?



Second Reading: Genesis 22:1–18

“God put Abraham to the test and said to him: Abraham! ‘Here I am!’ he replied.”

Genesis 22:1

Easter Vigil Retreat

You’ve come a long way on your journey of faith. You’ve become part of a faith community, grown in knowledge and awareness of God, and made new friends and memories. You’ve been preparing for the next step—initiation into the Church and reception of the sacraments.

The reflections and activities during this time of reflection and sharing will help you prepare in heart and spirit for the celebration of Christ’s resurrection and the next stage of your faith journey.

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds to your presence. Guide our steps along our journey of faith today and always, so that we may come closer to you every day. Amen.

"Here I am!" Can we respond so eagerly to God's call? God has given Abraham so much, but now God is asking Abraham: *Do you trust me? Are you really ready to answer my call?* As you look forward to entering the Church, these are questions you must answer as well.

- Look back on your faith journey during the RCIA process. What have you felt called to sacrifice or offer during this journey? (A habit that wasn't Christian? A way of thinking? A commitment of time for Mass and RCIA sessions?) It should be a sacrifice that had meaning for you.
- What have you gained as a result of making this sacrifice?

Third Reading: Exodus 14:15—15:1

"Then the LORD said to Moses:...'Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea, and split it in two, that the Israelites may pass through the sea on dry land.'"

Exodus 14:15–16

God is still working miracles for each of us. As you've gone through the RCIA process, you've traveled on a journey similar to that of the Israelites. God called you from the slavery of sin to the freedom of loving God and others. You've broken with your past life to discover a new life with God and his Church. All along your journey, God has guided and protected you.

- How are you different from when you started the RCIA process?
- What was the most wonderful thing God did for you on this journey? (A special memory? Someone you met? A prayer experience?)
- What has been the most difficult part of the process for you? How has God guided and protected you through that difficult time?

Fourth Reading: Isaiah 54:5–14

"Though the mountains fall away and the hills be shaken, My love shall never fall away from you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you."

Isaiah 54:10

This is a love letter from God. God is pictured here as a spouse and lover who wants to be reconciled with us, to shower us with love.

A Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position...Close your eyes... Breathe in...Breathe out...Breathe in...Breathe out... Breathe in...Breathe out...Keep paying attention to your breath...If thoughts come, let them go and bring your attention back to your breath.

Now imagine that you're surrounded by God's love just as you're surrounded by the air...With each breath, imagine that you breathe God's love into your whole being...And as you breathe out, you breathe love back to God.

- What human relationship best describes your relationship with God?
- How would your life be different if you believed that God is as close to you as a best friend and cares for you in the same way?

Fifth Reading: Isaiah 55:1–11

"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it."

Isaiah 55:11

This reading speaks eloquently about the power of God's word.

Spend some time in quiet reflection on God's word. Ask God to reveal to you something about your journey through this reading. Read this passage slowly and prayerfully. As you read, be aware of your reactions. What phrase or verse causes the strongest reaction in you? Consider negative reactions as well as positive feelings. A feeling of discomfort or tension might indicate something God wants to show you but that you're resisting.

Silently repeat the phrase that causes strong reaction. Don't think about what it means, simply repeat it over and over. Imagine that you're hearing God repeat the phrase to you. Continue to pray this way for a few minutes.

Now sit silently and reflect on this phrase and how it relates to your life. Talk to God about what thoughts and feelings you have. Listen inside yourself for any response that might be God's prompting.

Finally, let yourself grow silent again and simply sit in the presence of God and God's word.

- What change can you make in your life based on what you've learned from this word of God? Resolve to make this step.

Sixth Reading: Baruch 3:9–15, 32—4:4

"Blessed are we, O Israel; for what pleases God is known to us!"

Baruch 4:4

This reading talks about wisdom. But, as this and other readings make clear, the "wisdom" the world follows isn't always the true wisdom of God. As St. Paul tells us, the wisdom of God often seems foolish to those who look for worldly approval and success. In your journey through the RCIA process, you've learned a lot about the difference between God's perspective and the world's.

Make a list of "wisdom" messages from the world. Then for each piece of the world's "wisdom," write what God's wisdom is, using quotations from Jesus if possible. For example, world wisdom: "Whoever dies with the most toys wins." God's wisdom:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal."

Matthew 6:19–20

- What is your definition of wisdom?
- How is it different from what you thought was wise before you joined this group?

Seventh Reading: Ezekiel 36:16–28

"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 36:26

A Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position...Close your eyes...Now breathe in...Breathe out...Breathe in...Breathe out... Breathe in...Breathe out...With each breath, imagine that your mind is sinking deeper...deeper to the center of yourself...your heart.

You're still breathing and thinking from your center, your heart...Now ask God to show you your heart... What is it like?...What needs to be changed in your heart?

Now, imagine that God is creating a new heart within you. What is God's heart like?...How do you feel with this new heart within you?

- After the meditation, draw your two hearts, the old and the new, in your journal. In the old heart, write or draw the things that are changing. In the new heart, write or draw what the new heart has that the old heart doesn't.