



*A
Simple
Outline
of the
Catholic
Faith*

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*Dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary on the feast of her Nativity, 2023
And rededicated on the feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel, 2024*

INTRODUCTION

IN SUMMARY

The Summary sidebar sums up the principal points given in the main body of the text, sometimes by adding an extra point implied, but perhaps not made explicit, in the text itself.

Suggestions for further reading may be found on the homepage of St Pancras parish website:
stpancraschurch.org.uk

Suggestions include:

The Catechism Simply Explained by Canon Cafferata

Hart's Student's Catholic Doctrine by Charles Hart

This is the Faith by Canon J. Ripley

I Believe by J.P.M. van der Ploeg O.P.

This *Simple Outline of the Catholic Faith* is intended to be just that, an easy-to-access introduction to the main beliefs, and some of the main practices, of the Catholic Church.

It does not cover everything, and will – or, at least, is intended to – raise more questions than it answers.

Each topic is covered in just two sides of A4 which means that each topic is necessarily, and by design, brief. But it is hoped that by the end of all twenty topics the reader will have gained an overview of what the Catholic Faith is all about.

For the most part, technical vocabulary is avoided or, where it is thought helpful for the reader to know specialist terms, definitions and explanations are given.

To help make the information as easy to access as possible, footnotes and references have been left out. Suggestions for further reading can be found in the column to the left.

The coloured text boxes and sidebars are designed to catch the eye and provide useful shortcuts to essential or enriching details. What each text box or sidebar is meant to include is explained in those boxes in this introduction.

Chiefly, this *Simple Outline* is intended for those who would like to become Catholic. As such, it will be useful for priests and catechists who are setting out to explain what the Catholic Faith involves as well as for the converts themselves.

For an adult preparing for the Sacrament of Baptism, or for someone getting ready to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church, this outline will need to be accompanied by several sessions with a priest or catechist who, in turn, will unpack the riches of each of the topics which are only introduced in the following pages. This outline, on its own, is not intended to serve as a full preparation for adult Baptism or reception into full communion.

But this *Outline* may also prove helpful for Catholics who know the Faith but want to be reminded of some of the key beliefs, or want helpful words, phrases, and points for debate that they can use when talking about the Catholic Faith to family members, friends, or work colleagues. For these Catholics, the *Simple Outline* should serve as a springboard into other, fuller, texts and resources.

With this in mind, the *Simple Outline* is made readily available (on the website of St Pancras Catholic Church in Ipswich, UK, and in free, printed hard copies) so that it can be handed on to as many people as possible. The idea is unashamedly to get the Catholic Faith ‘out there,’ as we might say. Hard copies may be found at St Pancras church, and it may be downloaded from the parish website, stpancraschurch.org.uk, where there are also suggestions of further reading.

The author hopes Catholics will hand out copies generously, or refer other people to the website as often as possible.

If you are the only practising Catholic in your family, and other family members ask about the Faith, give them a copy.

If your friends know you are a Catholic and keep asking you about what you believe, hand them a copy.

If you are the only Catholic in your work place and you are considered something of an oddity, hand copies of this *Simple Outline* to your colleagues.

We Catholics must grow in confidence, and learn not to be shy about, or embarrassed by, our Catholic Faith. As St Peter says, we must

be ‘*ready always to satisfy every one that asks you a reason of that hope that is in you*’ (1 Peter 3:15). Perhaps this *Simple Outline* will help practising Catholics in exactly this way, and encourage us, as Our Lord Himself says, to preach from the housetops! (Mt 10:27).

Whatever use you put this *Simple Outline* to, make sure, if you are serious about the Catholic Faith, that you accompany your reading with prayer for, as St Philip Neri said, ‘There is nothing the devil fears so much, or so much tries to hinder, as prayer.’ Why so? Because it is prayer, above all things, that draws us into the life of God, and because, as the same saint says, ‘These things are learned more by prayer than by study.’

From the Scriptures

Every topic will be supported by at least one quotation from Scripture. All quotations are from the Douai-Rheims translation of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

From the Fathers of the Church

The Fathers of the Church are our predecessors, especially the earlier teachers, who have instructed the Church in the teaching of the Apostles during the Church’s infancy and first growth. There are differences of opinion about who, exactly, is included in the list of the Fathers but certainly they include the four great teachers, Saints Gregory, Jerome, Augustine, and Ambrose, and many others besides.

From the Saints

The saints include all those who have been canonized by the Church as a result of their lives of heroic virtue, and their being models of what someone in that state of life should be, for example layman, lay-woman, priest, monk, nun, bishop, pope, and so forth.

Did you know...?

The ‘did you know?’ box provides an interesting or curious fact to complement the main body of the text.

PRAYERS

Every topic page will include at least one prayer many of which all Catholics know (or should know!) off by heart. Many of them are learned by rote during childhood and are so commonly used that most Catholics hardly think about them. Instead, they readily trip off the tongue.

1. GOD: FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

IN SUMMARY

There is only one God.

God is not created, but has always existed and always will. He is eternal.

God is perfect, infinite, self-sufficient, and immutable (unchanging).

God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (He is everywhere).

There is only one God but there are three Persons in one God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

God is pure spirit: He has no body.

There is only one thing God cannot do, and that is to contradict His own nature and make Himself less than God.

Before we start to look at the idea of three Persons in one God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), it is worth pausing to consider what we call the attributes of God. As one book puts it, ‘God is infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself.’ This raises questions straight away, for example if God is infinitely perfect why did He bother to create anything else? But we shall come to that soon.

First, God was not created. Nothing brought Him into existence: He always existed without any help from anyone else. He is also eternal, which means that for God there is no past or future. Instead, He lives in what we call an eternal present. He can see everything from our past and everything in our future all at once. It is as if God lives in a time vacuum. God never had a beginning, and He will never cease to exist.

Second, God is self-sufficient, which means that He is and has everything He needs. Nothing that He creates, nothing that we give Him, nothing that happens, can make Him greater or less great. He is eternally perfect.

Third, God is immutable, which means He never changes. This means, among other things, that if He loved us enough to create us in the first place, and if the Son of God loved us enough to die for us on the Cross, then He still loves us whatever we might have done, or whatever has happened to us.

God is omnipotent, or all-powerful. There is nothing God cannot do. Actually, there is one thing He cannot do: He cannot contradict His own nature and make Himself less than God. But apart from that, nothing is impossible with God (Lk 1:37).

God is omniscient, or all-knowing. There is nothing that God does not know. He knows the inner workings of our minds and our hearts. He knows what will happen, and He even knows what would have happened had circumstances been different.

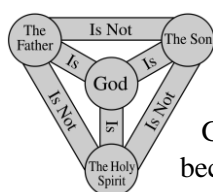
‘Lord, thou hast proved me, and known me: Thou hast known my sitting down, and my rising up. Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off: my path and my line thou hast searched out. And thou hast foreseen all my ways: for there is no speech in my tongue [unknown to thee]. Behold, O Lord, thou hast known all things, the last and those of old: thou hast formed me, and hast laid thy hand upon me’

Psalm 138:1-5

And finally, for the moment, God is omnipresent. That is, God is everywhere.

The next thing to consider is that there is only one God but there are three Persons in one God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost).

Did you know...? St Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, said that God was a little bit like a shamrock which has one stem but three leaves.



God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are not three different faces of God but three distinct Persons. Each is God (even though there is only one God) because each shares the divine nature.

God the Father begot God the Son. The Son was begotten, not created. The Son is not a creature, but is co-equal with the Father and co-eternal with Him, sharing the same divine nature. In the fulness of time the Only-Begotten Son of the Father became incarnate, that is, He assumed a body, became Man, and became like us in all things except sin. We shall say more of this later.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the life – the very breath – of the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son breathe this Gift of Life into each other so that the Holy Spirit is both the Giver of Life and the Gift of Life.

There is one last thing to say about God at this stage, and that is that He is pure spirit. God does not have a body, which means that He does not have the physical limitations that we have. This is how He manages to be everywhere at once. Because God does not have a body, and because He is pure spirit, we say that there are really only two things that God can do, but these two things cover everything else: He can know, and He can will (or act).

From the Scriptures

‘And it came to pass, in those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And forthwith coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit as a dove descending, and remaining on Him. And there came a voice from heaven: Thou art my beloved Son: in thee I am well pleased’ (Mk 1:9-11).

From the Fathers of the Church

The Church believes ‘in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit.’ (St Irenæus of Lyons).

From the Saints

‘The three Persons are distinct from one another: a sublime knowledge is infused into the soul, imbuing it with a certainty of the truth that the three are of one substance, power, knowledge, and are one God.’ (St Teresa of Ávila).

THE APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

2. CREATION AND THE ANGELS

IN SUMMARY

God is eternal: He had no beginning and has no end.

God created everything that exists 'ex nihilo.'

He sustains in being everything that He has created.

The account of the creation may be found in the Book of Genesis.

God created everything in six days, and on the seventh day, the Sabbath, He rested.

God created invisible creatures whom we call angels.

Everyone has a Guardian Angel to guard and guide them in this life and to lead them to heaven.

As we know, God always existed. He had no beginning, and He will have no end. He is eternal. But everything else that exists was created by God. He brought it into being. He did not create the universe by gathering together material that already existed. He created everything that exists out of nothing, or as we say in Latin, 'ex nihilo.'

We do not know how God created everything out of nothing, but we do know that God is powerful enough to do exactly that. Scientific theory tells us that there was a big bang, and that the universe continues to expand even today as a result of such a vast explosion. Science and religion do not contradict each other: there is no reason why there should not have been a big bang, but Catholics believe that God made the big bang to happen. Perhaps this was the moment at which God said, 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3), and so began the work of creation.

Did you know...? It was a Catholic priest, Fr Georges Lemaître, who first suggested the idea, in 1927, that we live in an expanding universe. At that time, even Einstein refused to accept that the universe was expanding.

In the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, we can read the account of God's creation. Perhaps unexpectedly, the order in which things are created matches the geological framework which we now know to be true: light and darkness, space and the heavens, the earth, plant life, animal life, and finally human beings. The six days of creation do not necessarily correspond to six of our 24 hour periods (although God was certainly capable of creating the world in that time frame). Rather, the Book of Genesis reveals God-given truths by providing meaning for what we see around us.

There is order and harmony, both between the Creator and His created world as well as between each of the creatures that He has made. And after each act of creation, God saw that what He made was good. Indeed, at the end of the day on which He created Adam and Eve, He saw that His work was 'very good.'

On the seventh day, God rested. This became known as the sabbath, a word which in Hebrew means rest. In the third of the Ten Commandments God commanded that this be made a holy day, given over and consecrated to the Lord and on which no servile labour may be undertaken. We must rest in the Lord.

Not only did God create everything that exists, He also sustains everything and keeps everything in existence. Were He to forget any of His creatures, they would not die. Rather, they would simply cease to exist.

God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and the essence of 'love' is 'giving.' To love means to give. So, when we say that God is love we mean that it is His very nature to give. He cannot not give; and, what's more, He cannot take. Love can be given and received but never taken. Once God has given a gift, even He cannot take it back again because that would mean He would contradict His own nature, which, as we have seen, is the one thing God cannot do.

God gives different layers of gifts, if you like, to different creatures. To rocks and other inanimate objects He gives the gift of existence. To plant life He gives existence and life. To sensate creatures He gives existence, life, and sensations. Then there are His rational creatures, angels and human beings. We shall come to people later but His angels are part of the invisible order of creation. Angels are an important part of our Catholic Faith, which is not surprising given that they are mentioned in almost every book of the Bible. The word angel comes from the Greek word 'angelos' which means messenger. There are seven archangels (three of whose names we know from the Bible: Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel) and many millions of other angels, all of whom carry messages between Creator and other creatures. But there are other types of spiritual beings too. Pope St Gregory the Great was the first pope to list them categorically.

St Michael the Archangel, whose name means 'Who is like to God,' was responsible for casting Lucifer (the devil) out of heaven when he, Lucifer, rebelled against the authority of God (Apocalypse 12:1-18). St Raphael, 'The healing of God,' accompanied Tobias on his journey in the Book of Tobit, and St Gabriel, 'The Strength of God,' announced the birth of Christ to Mary (Lk 1:26-38).

In addition, every human being has a Guardian Angel given to us by God to look after us and to lead us to heaven (Mt 18:10).

From the Scriptures

'I am Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the Lord. And when they heard these things, they were troubled, and being seized with fear they fell upon the ground on their face' (Tobit 12:15-16).

'And He says to [Nathanael], Amen, amen I say to you, you shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (Jn 1:51).

From the Fathers of the Church

'We know on the authority of Scripture that there are nine orders [or choirs] of angels: Angels, Archangels, Virtues, and Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim,' (Pope St Gregory the Great).

From the Saints

'Our Guardian Angels are our most faithful friends, because they are with us day and night, always and everywhere. We ought often to invoke them,' (St John Vianney).

THE GLORY BE

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

PRAYER TO MY GUARDIAN ANGEL

Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here,
ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

3. TO HIS IMAGE AND LIKENESS

IN SUMMARY

Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God.

This likeness is chiefly in our souls which are pure spirit, immortal, and are possessed of the faculties of knowledge of God and free will.

When he was created, Adam was given *preternatural* gifts, and, more importantly, was given the *supernatural* gift of *justification* which means that he enjoyed the presence of *sanctifying grace* (the indwelling of God's breath and life) in his soul.

God made us to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life and to be happy with Him forever in the next.

The high point of God's creation is mankind. No other creatures can match the wonder of God's creation. To human beings God gave the gifts of existence, sentient life, and a rational and immortal soul. When God created the first human beings, He did so with the words, '*Let us make man to our image and likeness*' (Gen 1:26). But in what way is man made in God's image and likeness? God does not have a body, so we cannot be like Him in our bodies. Chiefly, then, our likeness to God is in our souls.

Our souls are pure spirit, like God. Our souls are immortal, like God. Our souls are rational, just as God is rational. And our souls are endowed with free will, just as God has free will. These faculties of our souls, along with our physical bodies, go together to make up what we call human nature.

In addition to this human nature, God gave certain gifts to Adam – the very first human being – to hold on behalf of all who would follow him. These extra gifts fell into two groups.

First, what we call the *preternatural* gifts, from the Latin word, *præter* meaning *beyond* nature. These gifts went beyond what was natural to mankind, and included (i) impassibility, that is, the possibility of not suffering or dying, (ii) infused knowledge of God, and (iii) integrity of passions, which means that what would otherwise have been our unruly passions and desires were kept in check by the rational soul.

Second, what we call the *supernatural* gift of justification, from the Latin meaning *above* nature. Original justification meant that Adam stood justified – righteous – before God. He had the gift of sanctifying grace in His soul, that is, God's own breath of life had been breathed into His soul, which in turn meant that He participated in the divine life, God's own life.

'And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul.'

Genesis 2:7

The most important of these gifts was original justification, that is, the presence of sanctifying grace in his soul. Eve was given these gifts too, but it was Adam who was commissioned to hold them on behalf of the whole human race. Some theologians believe that when God fashioned Adam, He was using Jesus (even though He was not yet born) as the model.

What does being made to God's image and likeness mean in practical terms? First, it means that our souls are immortal and can never die: they can cease to have God's life of sanctifying grace in them as a result of sin, and can end up in hell, but they cannot die in the way that bodies can.

Second, it means that our souls share in God's faculties of knowledge and free will. We can know

things, and we can freely act on what we know. We can choose what we do and how we behave. We have free will.

Third, we have a collaborative role in God's work of creation. Human beings were created in such a way that they can choose to procreate and bring new life into the world. The first commandment God gave to Adam and Eve was, *'increase and multiply, and fill the earth.'*

Fourth, we have a collaborative role in God's work of governance, of ordering and looking after His created order. God's second command was, *'subdue [the earth], and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth'* (Gen 1:28).

Astonishingly, then, God ceded some of His power to His creatures. He made us partners in His two major works of creation and governance; not equal partners, certainly, but partners nonetheless, as St Paul says: *'We are God's coadjutors,'* or *'fellow workers'* as other translations of the Bible say (1 Cor 3:9). This point becomes especially important when we start to look at the topic of redemption and how God chooses to use His creatures in order to save His creatures from their own sins.

Did you know...? The Catholic Church teaches that there was a first man and a first woman, and that the human soul was directly infused into their living bodies by God, as each soul is infused into each person at the moment of his or her conception. This does not necessarily mean that the theory of evolution is wrong: it just means that we haven't worked out yet how the teaching of the Church and the scientific theory relate to each other.

From the Scriptures

'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast set him over the works of thy hand' (Ps 8:5-6).

From the Fathers of the Church

'God... in His exceeding goodness wished certain things to come into existence which enjoy His benefits and share in His goodness... Yes, even man, who is a compound of the visible and the invisible' (St John Damascene)

From the Saints

'Man is thus exceedingly dear to God, who made him truly in His own image and likeness; he was to exercise all the virtues in the perfection of holiness, as indeed God formed all creatures to do, and to work in humble obedience to do acts of virtue, and so fulfil the function of praise among the more glorious orders of angels' (St Hildegard of Bingen).

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

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

OUR FATHER

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.

4. ORIGINAL SIN AND THE FALL

IN SUMMARY

In his pride, Lucifer rebelled against the goodness of God and was cast out of heaven.

Lucifer, the serpent, tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil' by persuading them that they would become their own gods.

By committing the original sin, Adam forfeited both the preternatural gifts of impassibility, infused knowledge, and integrity of passions as well as the supernatural gift of original justification (the presence of divine life in his soul).

This fall from grace is known as the Fall.

The Catholic religion has just one purpose, the redemption of mankind from this Fall.

In the very last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse, we can read about Lucifer's cosmic rebellion against God. Having been created as the most beautiful and light-filled of all the angels (his name means the light-bringer), he forgot that his gifts came from God and began to credit himself with these gifts. In addition, and knowing that another creature who belonged to a lower order of beings than himself was soon to be created, he became jealous. This other creature was, of course, the grace-filled Mary, the Mother of God (Lk 1:28; Apoc 12:4). In his pride, he rebelled against God's truth and goodness and was cast out of heaven by St Michael the Archangel, but he took one third of all the angels with him (Apoc chap. 12).

In his rage, Lucifer (also known as the devil or Satan) began to go about on the face of the earth, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). His first victims were Adam and Eve.

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, He gave them everything they needed but commanded them not to eat of the fruit '*of the tree of knowledge of good and evil*' (Gen 2:17). Of course they needed to know the *difference* between good and evil, but it was not for them to *decide* what was good and what was evil: God, their Creator, had already decided that for them.

Lucifer, taking the form of a serpent, tempted Eve, persuading her that if she ate the fruit of this tree, she would become as God, '*knowing good and evil*' (Gen 3:5), that is, she would have enough wisdom to be able to decide for herself what constituted good and evil. In other words, she would become her own God and would no longer need the Creator.

Eve, in turn, persuaded Adam who, it must be remembered, held the supernatural gift of justification on behalf of all other human beings yet to be born. As soon as he tasted the forbidden fruit from this tree, he forfeited for himself, and for the whole human race, the preternatural gifts he had been given as well as the supreme gift of *original justification*, that is, the gift of sanctifying grace which was the breath of divine life in his soul.

This first sin by a human being is what is known as the *original sin*, and this whole act of pride and disobedience is known as the Fall. Mankind fell from grace and became alienated from its Creator.

As soon as they realized what they had done, they saw that they were naked and they hid themselves, covering their bodies with fig leaves. In other words, thinking that they would be

Did you know...? The Latin word *malum* means, in English, both *evil* and *apple*. Perhaps this is why the fruit that Eve plucked from tree in the Garden of Eden is often seen as an apple whereas, in fact, she plucked fruit not from an apple tree but from the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil' (Gen 2:17).

able to see and know all things, even into the hearts of other people to judge the good and evil hidden there, they were shocked to discover that, in fact, they did not have all the knowledge of God. By contrast, they realized that God could see right into and through them. They felt vulnerable and guilty before the face of God.

Human nature was damaged as a result of original sin and suffered four wounds from the Fall: *ignorance* – Adam's understanding of God and the things of God was darkened and left imperfect; *malice* – Adam's free will, which before the Fall, inclined automatically towards God and all that was good, now automatically inclined towards that which offends God; *weakness* – Adam was left spiritually weak, incapable of doing anything of eternal value, or anything that might help towards his salvation, without the help of God's grace; *concupiscence* – Adam's passions and desires came to dominate his rational soul so that he found himself easily giving in to what he felt instead of doing what He knew was right.

The four cardinal virtues of *prudence*, *justice*, *fortitude*, and *temperance* are the counterparts of these four wounds, and we shall look at them later.

Finally, having forfeited God's friendship and alienated himself from his Creator, Adam found himself, along with Eve, cast out from the Garden of Eden and incapable of re-entering paradise or re-establishing his friendship with God through his own efforts (Gen 3:24). From now on, he was subject to the '*roaring lion*'. The whole point of the Catholic religion is our redemption from this state of loss, as God Himself promised straightaway (Gen 3:15), a process known as the *atonement*, the at-one-ment, that is, the reconciliation of mankind with God.

From the Scriptures

'By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin, death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned' (Romans 5:12).

From the Fathers of the Church

'For God has not only made us out of nothing, but He gave us freely... a life in correspondence with God. But men, having rejected things eternal, and by counsel of the devil, turned to the things of corruption, [and] became the cause of their own corruption in death' (St Athanasius).

From the Saints

'What does it matter if you can win a thousand battles if you cannot win against your own corrupt passions?' (Blessed Carlo Acutis).

'In fact, my children, it is sin that brings upon us all calamities, all scourges, war, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, fires, frost, hail, storms, all that afflicts us, all that makes us miserable.' (St John Vianney, the Curé d'Ars).

TWO ACTS OF CONTRITION

O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace I will not sin again. Amen

O my God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins, and detest them above all things, because they deserve your dreadful punishments, because they have crucified my loving Saviour Jesus Christ, and, most of all, because they offend your infinite goodness; and I firmly resolve, by the help of your grace, never to offend you again, and carefully to avoid the occasions of sin. Amen.

5. TRADITION AND THE BIBLE

IN SUMMARY

The Bible is the inspired Word of God.

It is made up of 46 books in the Old Testament (covering the time before Christ was born) and 27 books in the New Testament (covering the life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ).

The Bible is the main source of divine revelation along with Sacred Tradition.

The books of the Bible were written by members of the Church: even the Old Testament, written before the Church was brought into being by Our Lord, was written by those whom the Catholic Church venerates as saints of the Church.

The official translation of the Bible into Latin by St Jerome is known as the Vulgate.

There are two sources of divine revelation, that is, there are two ways in which God makes His message known to us. First, there is Tradition with a capital ‘T’ and, second, there is the Bible, the spoken Word of God that has been written down.

Tradition includes all of those things that Our Lord taught His Apostles but which are not recorded in the Bible, or are only hinted at in the Bible. St John tells us that these events took place, and that these teachings were taught, when he writes, *‘But there are also many other things which Jesus did which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written’* (Jn 21:25). We know that Our Lord taught His Apostles in private, for example, how else could we know what transpired during His forty-day fast in the desert? or during His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He died? (Mt 4:1-11; Mt 26:36-46) We know, also, that Our Lord spoke to His disciples at length between His resurrection on Easter Day and His ascension back into heaven forty days later (Acts 1:3). These teachings the Apostles passed on to those who came after them, and many of them are included in the writings of the Church Fathers, some of whom knew the Apostles personally (for example, St Ignatius and St Polycarp who were friends of St John), and others of whom were second or third generation Christians and had heard these teachings from those who had known the Apostles.

We will look at Tradition again when we look at the Church.

The Bible is the second source of divine revelation. Many people think that the Catholic Church’s teachings are based on the Bible. In reality, though, the Bible is based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. After all, the Bible – most obviously the New Testament – was written by people who were already members of the Church: St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke, St John, St Paul, and so forth. These people were members of the Church before they started to write the Four Gospels or the Letters that are now in the Bible. And it was the Catholic Church that decided which texts should be included in the Bible and which should not (see below).

The Bible itself is not one book. It is a collection of books which include narratives, poems, letters, lists, and so on. The collection of books that Christians today know as the Bible was put together by the Church to include the Jewish books that had already been translated from Aramaic and Hebrew into Greek

(a collection we know as the Septuagint) and which came to be called the Old Testament, along with all of the books of what we now call the New Testament.

The Old Testament books tell us about the creation of the world, about the Fall of mankind, about the story of the People of Israel, and all of the events leading up to the coming of the Messiah, the promised and Chosen One of God, for whom the People of Israel had long been waiting.

The New Testament includes the Four Gospels which tell us about the birth, the life, the teachings, miracles, the sufferings, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus (written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the Acts of the Apostles which tell us about the life and experiences of the early Christian community (also written by Luke), the Letters of St Paul, several other letters, and the Apocalypse (written by St John).

Which texts should be included in the Bible and which should not (for example, the Gospel of Thomas was not included) was finally and definitively decided at the Council of Rome in the year 382. This decision was formally

Did you know...? The *canon* of Biblical books (from the Greek *kanōn* meaning rule) is a list of those books that officially belong in the Bible. The Catholic Bible has 46 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament, whereas the Protestants at the time of the Reformation dropped some of these books from the canon.

reaffirmed at the Synod of Hippo (AD 393), at the Council of Carthage (AD 397), and again at another Council of Carthage (AD 419). These decisions were accepted by everyone right up until the time of Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer in the sixteenth century, who decided that he would make his own decision about what should be in the Bible and what should not (for example, he said the Letter of St James in the New Testament should not be included because of its teaching on the need for good works even though that teaching had been accepted by everyone else for 1,500 years). The official translation of the Bible into Latin by St Jerome in the fourth century is known as the Vulgate.

From the Scriptures

‘How sweet are thy words to my palate! more than honey to my mouth’ (Ps 118:103).

‘God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days has spoken to us by His Son’ (Hebrews 1:1).

From the Fathers of the Church

‘Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ’ (St Jerome).

‘The new [testament] is, in the old, concealed; the old [testament] is in the new revealed’ (St Augustine).

From the Saints

‘The man who thirsts for God eagerly studies and meditates on the inspired Word knowing that there he is certain to find the One for whom he thirsts’ (St Bernard of Clairvaux).

‘I would give up my life a thousand times, not only for each of the truths of Sacred Scripture, but even more for the least of the ceremonies of the Catholic Church’ (St Teresa of Ávila).

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of thy love.

✠ Send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created.

✠ And thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray: O God, who has taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the gift of the same Holy Spirit they may be truly wise and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

6. THE INCARNATION

IN SUMMARY

The Incarnation refers to the teaching that the eternal Son of God (the second Person of the Trinity) was made Man, without ceasing to be God, and was born of a woman in a stable in Bethlehem.

The union of the two natures – human and divine – in the one Person of Jesus Christ is known as the hypostatic union.

The coming of the Messiah (that is, the Anointed One) had been foretold by the prophets.

The Son of God, that is, Our Lord Jesus Christ, came into the world so that *we ‘may have life, and have it more abundantly’* (Jn 10:10) by being redeemed from our fallen state, and by being made *‘sons of God,’* and *‘partakers in the divine nature’* (Jn 1:12; 2 Peter 1:4).

The Incarnation is the most important doctrine of the Catholic Church after the doctrine of the Trinity. The Incarnation is the name we give to the truth that the Son of God (or the Word of God) took on human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and became Man, like us in all things but sin.

Some theologians hold that the Son of God would have become incarnate had there been no sin, and that Adam was created by God with the model of Jesus Christ in mind, even though Jesus had not yet been born (and that this is, in part, what the Bible means when it says that Adam and Eve were created in God’s image and likeness). But most theologians hold that the Son of God only became incarnate because sin was introduced into God’s created world. Either way, the reason the Son of God became Man was for our sake: so that we could become more like to Him who had become like to us, and so that we could participate in His divine life and enter into the glory of heaven once our life here on earth had come to an end.

The Son of God is the only Person from the Blessed Trinity who became Man. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit remain pure spirit. By contrast, *‘when the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons’* (Galatians 4:4-5).

The People of Israel had long awaited the coming of the Messiah (from the Greek word meaning ‘the anointed one’) who would save them from their enemies. The prophets had foretold that, *‘the people that walked in darkness, [would see] a great light; [and that] to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, a light [would be] risen.’* This light would come as a new-born child, for *‘a child is born for us,’* continued the prophecy, *‘and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God-the-Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace’* (Isaiah 9:2, 6).

God had already told His prophet that, *‘a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel’* (Isaiah 7:14). This son would spring up like a shoot from the root of Jesse (who was King David’s father), and would be possessed of *‘the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness. And [that He would] be filled with the spirit of*

of the fear of the Lord' (Isaiah 11:1-3). With His coming, unity and harmony between God and Man, and between one creature and another, would be restored such that the *'wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid'* (Isaiah 11:6).

In the fulness of time, the Angel of the Lord appeared and announced to Mary that she would be the virgin who would bear this Son, and that she would call His name Jesus (Lk 1:26-38). So, the child was born in Bethlehem, *'and [He] grew, and was strengthened in spirit... until the day of His manifestation to Israel'* (Lk 1:80).

The great paradox of the birth of the Son of God is that He is both fully God and fully Man. He is not half and half. He is not God who just appeared to be Man. Nor is He merely

a Man but with divine powers. The whole of the Catholic Faith hangs on this mystery, the mystery of the Incarnation, and from it follows on many other paradoxes of the Catholic Faith.

Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, became Incarnate of the Virgin Mary. He has two natures (He has both human nature and divine nature). He has two wills (He has a human will and a divine will). And yet He is only one Person. During His life on earth He fulfilled all of the prophecies that had been told about Him in the Scriptures which we call the Old Testament (Lk 24:27).

The hypostatic union of the divine nature and the human nature, combined in one Person, is the perfect example of God making use of something He has created (human flesh and a human will) to bring about the redemption of fallen human creatures. But we must be careful here. We *never* think of Christ as having been created (even though He took to Himself a created body). Christ is not a creature: He is the Only-Begotten Son of God who became Man through the mystery of the Incarnation. He is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Did you know...? The term that we give to the union of human nature and divine nature in the one Person of Christ is the *hypostatic union*, from the Greek words meaning a union of two underlying realities or substances (human and divine).

From the Scriptures

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made sons of God, and to them that believe in His name, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:1-4, 11-14).

From the Fathers of the Church

'Without ceasing to be what He was, He became what He was not' (St Gregory Nazianzen).

From the Saints

'Nothing so humbles the proud sinner as the humility of Jesus Christ's humanity' (St Anthony of Padua).

THE ANGELUS

☩ The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary ☩ And she conceived by the Holy Spirit *Hail Mary...*

☩ Behold the handmaid of the Lord ☩ Be it done unto me according to thy word *Hail Mary...*

☩ And the Word was made flesh ☩ And dwelt among us *Hail Mary...*

☩ Pray for us, O holy Mother of God ☩ That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may, by His Passion + and Cross, be brought to the glory of His resurrection. Through the same Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

7. THE PASSION & DEATH OF OUR LORD

IN SUMMARY

The Passion refers to the sufferings and death of Christ.

To love means to give.

Christ, in humble obedience to His Father's will (in contrast to Adam's pride and disobedience) willingly chose to give His life as a ransom for sinners, buying back from God the Father the gifts forfeited at the time of the Fall.

Sins are forgiven, and we are redeemed, on the Cross.

Therefore, it is the Crucifix, and not the empty Cross, that is the icon of the Catholic Faith.

Holy Week is the most important time of the year for Catholics and includes the three ceremonies that make up what we call the *Sacred Triduum*.

Although this topic is called The Passion & Death of Our Lord, the term 'the Passion' can refer both to His sufferings and to His death together. Our English word *passion* comes from the Latin word that means suffering.

The death of Our Lord on the Cross is the central event and message of the Catholic Faith. Its importance cannot be overstated.

Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden was born of pride and disobedience. In his pride he thought that he could become his own god and not need his Creator (Gen 3:5). As a result, he disobeyed the commandment he had been given (Gen 2:17).

By way of contrast, the Son of God humbled Himself and became obedient to God the Father, even to the point of dying on the Cross (Phil 2:8). It is because of this that St Paul refers to Christ as the new or second Adam. Christ came to put right what Adam had got wrong so that '*as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive*' (1 Cor 15:22, and v.45).

But why did Christ have to die? First, let us be clear: death is not a good thing. God did not invent or create death. As it says in the Book of Wisdom, '*Death is not of God's fashioning*' (Wis 1:13, Knox translation). Death, along with all sickness, disease, and disability, is the result of mankind damaging the harmony that was always intended to exist between Creator and creature, and the harmony that was always intended to exist between one creature and another. This does not mean that God curses individuals with sickness and death because of his or her particular sins, but it does mean that Adam's original sin and our actual sins have damaged human nature and left us susceptible to suffering and death.

Second, Christ entered into the likeness of men by taking to Himself human nature. Christ Himself – being God, as He is – never suffered the stain of Adam's original sin nor did He ever commit any actual sins. Christ is the very definition of innocence. Even so, He took upon Himself the weight of the consequences of mankind's sins. He offered this burden up to God the Father with cries '*and tears... prayers and supplications*' (Hebrews 5:7), pleading that sinners might be forgiven, and that the gifts forfeited at the Fall might be restored to a fallen race. In doing so, Christ made the perfect sacrifice of Himself by plumbing the very depths of mankind's alienation from its Creator, sinking to the very lowest level of

human wretchedness and misery, even to the point of death.

Third, we must remember that the essence of love is giving. To love means to give. Whereas Adam tried to take to himself authority, power, wisdom, and even life itself, from God, Christ, through a free act of His will, chose to give. He gave His life, as He says in John's Gospel: *'I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No man takes it away from me, but I lay it down of myself'* (Jn 10:17-18). It was in this act of self-oblation, this act of total self-giving, that we can see in action the definition of what St John means when he says, *'God is love'* (1 Jn 4:8). And this is why St Paul says of Christ that He is *'the image of the invisible God'* (Col 1:15). When we look at the Crucifix, we see God, and we see perfect love. As Our Lord says to the Apostle Philip, *'He that sees me, sees the Father also'* (Jn 14:9).

The resurrection, which we shall look at soon, is no mere afterthought or appendix to the life and death of Christ, for *'if Christ be not risen again, your faith is in vain'* (1 Cor 15:17). Even so, it was precisely in His act of giving – in His act of laying down

His life of His own free will – that Christ redeemed us. This is why the Crucifix, with the body of Christ upon it, is the icon of the Catholic Faith, and not an empty cross.

The sufferings of Christ are found chiefly in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He died; in His scourging at the hands of Roman soldiers during His trial; whilst carrying His Cross to Calvary; whilst being nailed to the Cross; and as He was dying on that same Cross. These sufferings, undergone for our sake, form the richest and most fruitful subjects for our prayer, meditation, and contemplation.

Did you know...? The three most important ceremonies of the year for Catholics (known as the *Sacred Triduum*) fall during Holy Week on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, immediately before Easter Sunday. They are so important that Catholics should even rearrange work schedules if possible, and change holiday plans if necessary, to make sure that they can attend.

From the Scriptures

'Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death on the Cross' (Philippians 2:6-8).

From the Fathers of the Church

'Let us fix our gaze on the blood of Christ and realize how precious it is to His Father, seeing that it was poured out for our salvation and brought the grace of conversion to the whole world' (St Clement of Rome).

From the Saints

'We cannot go to heaven in feather beds' (St Thomas More).

'Whenever anything disagreeable or displeasing happens to you, remember Christ crucified, and be silent' (St John of the Cross).

'The Cross is the school of love' (St Maximilian Kolbe).

PRAYER BEFORE A CRUCIFIX

Behold, O good and sweetest Jesus, I cast myself upon my knees in Thy sight, and with the most fervent desire of my soul I pray and beseech Thee to impress upon my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope, and charity, true repentance for my sins, and a most firm purpose of amendment; whilst with deep affection and grief of soul I ponder within myself and mentally contemplate Thy five most precious wounds, having before mine eyes that which David long ago spoke in prophecy of Thee, O good Jesus: They have pierced my hands and my feet; they have numbered all my bones.

8. THE RESURRECTION & ASCENSION, AND PENTECOST

IN SUMMARY

Christ rose from the dead on the third day (Easter Day).

His risen body is real and physical, but has taken on glorious qualities.

Our Catholic Faith depends on the reality of Christ's death and resurrection.

Forty days later, Christ ascended into heaven to take His place on the throne at the right hand of God the Father.

Ten days later, the Holy Spirit was sent down upon the earth, giving birth to God's Church on the feast of Pentecost.

Along with Christmas and Easter, Pentecost is one of the three great feasts of the Church's year upon which hang all of the other seasons and feasts.

Our Lord Jesus Christ died on the very first Good Friday. He rose again from the dead on the third day, that is, the first Easter Sunday.

His resurrection was real and physical, not metaphorical or spiritual. He invited His Apostles to see and touch the wounds that had been made in His hands and side (Lk 24:39; Jn 20:27). He ate '*a piece of broiled fish, and a honeycomb*' (Lk24:41-43). He was no ghost.

Even so, His resurrected body enjoyed glorious qualities which it did not enjoy previously. He appeared in the midst of His Apostles in the middle of a locked room (Jn 20:19). His closest friends who had known Him for several years did not at first recognize Him (Jn 20:14; Lk 24:16). And He could disappear from their sight as suddenly as He had appeared (Lk 24:31).

Christ's resurrection from the dead is integral to His work of salvation and to our Faith. By rising from the dead – '*the first fruits of them that sleep*' (1 Cor 15:20) – the Son of God conquered death, the last and ultimate weapon in the devil's arsenal. From that moment onwards, whoever has been baptized in Christ, and remains in a state of grace (or is restored to grace again in the Sacrament of Confession if they lose it after they have been baptized), will not have to suffer everlasting death but will live forever in heaven, as St Paul wrote: '*If we be dead with Him, we shall live also with Him*' (2 Tim 2:12), and again, '*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?*' (1 Cor 15:54-55). All of which was foretold by the prophets: '*I will deliver them out of the hand of death. I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy death. O hell, I will be thy bite*' (Osee [Hosea] 13:14).

Our Lord's death on the Cross is the moment at which our sins are forgiven. His resurrection is the moment at which death is conquered definitively, and is the most glorious moment in human history, and, of course, in the Church's year.

Forty days after His resurrection, Our Lord ascended back into heaven to take His place at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 1:9-10; Ps 109:1). In doing so, He took, for the first time ever, a glorified human nature into heaven, where previously only spiritual beings (rather than physical beings) had been,

that is God Himself, of course, and the Angels.

When He took His place upon the throne, He became the Universal King of heaven and earth, and established the Kingdom of God. Henceforth, *'every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth'* (Philippians 2:10). In other words, not only in heaven should His rule hold sway, but in every form of society and government on earth also. The whole human race is duty-bound to bend the knee to the risen and ascended Christ who alone is Lord and King, and to submit to His precepts and commandments in the way it establishes and runs its various societies in all of its numerous nations.

Christ having ascended into heaven, God the Father and God the Son then sent the Holy Spirit down upon Our Lady and the Apostles, filling

Did you know...? When the Holy Spirit first came down upon the heads of Our Lady and the Apostles in the Upper Room at Pentecost, the Church was born. The feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Easter, is the Church's birthday.

them with the same gifts and power of the Holy Spirit with which Christ Himself had been filled (Acts 2:1-4; Isaiah 11:2-3). The Jewish feast of Pentecost (from the Greek word meaning fifty) fell fifty days after the Passover when the Jews celebrated Moses handing on the Law, the Ten Commandments, to the People of Israel. It was also a Jewish harvest thanksgiving festival. For Catholics, it is the memorial of the birth of the Church, and of the New Commandment that Our Lord gave to His Apostles when He said at the Last Supper, *'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you'* (Jn 13:34). And because it is the founding of the Church, it also marks the beginning of the new harvest of souls, as Our Lord said: *'Lift up your eyes and see the countries [or fields], for they are white already for harvest'* (Jn 4:35).

From the Scriptures

'He is not here. He has risen, as He said' (Mt 28:6).

'And when He had said these things, while they looked on, He was raised up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight' (Acts 1:9).

'And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon everyone of them' (Acts 2:3).

From the Fathers of the Church

'Indeed, God calls even the body to resurrection, and promises it everlasting life' (Justin Martyr).

'From that day [Pentecost] the showers of gracious gifts, the rivers of blessings, have watered every desert, and all the dry land' (Pope St Leo the Great).

From the Saints

'Those whose hearts are pure are temples of the Holy Spirit' (St Lucy).

REGINA CÆLI

Regina cæli, lætare, alleluia

Quia, quem meruisti portare, alleluia

Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia

Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia

Ÿ Gaude et lætare, Virgo Maria, alleluia

℞ Quia surrexit Dominus vere, alleluia

Oremus: Deus, qui per resurrectionem Filii tui, Domini nostri Iesu Christi, mundum lætificare dignatus es: præsta, quæsumus, ut per eius Genetricem Virginem Mariam, perpetuæ capiamus gaudia vitæ. Per eundem. Amen.

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia

The Son whom you merited to bear, alleluia

Has risen, as He said, alleluia

Pray for us to God, alleluia

Ÿ Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia

℞ For the Lord has truly rise, alleluia

Let us pray: O God, who through the resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, gave rejoicing to the world, grant, we pray, that through His Mother, the Virgin Mary, we may obtain the joy of everlasting life. Through... Amen.

9. THE CHURCH AND TRADITION

IN SUMMARY

The Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, the continuation in time of the personal presence of Christ on earth.

We are members of the Church, and Christ is the Head of the body.

The Church is also thought of as the Bride of Christ, with Our Lord as the Bridegroom.

The pope is the Vicar of Christ – His deputy – here on earth, and is the successor of St Peter, the first pope.

The bishops are the successors of the Apostles.

Tradition is the handing down, through the Fathers, Councils, and rites of the Church, of the teachings given to the Apostles by Christ but not contained in Scripture.

The Catholic Church came into being on that first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was sent down upon Our Lady and the Apostles who were waiting, in prayer, in the Upper Room (Acts 2:1-4). But what exactly is the Church?

The Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. It is the continuation in time of the personal presence of Our Lord. It is sometimes said that we, the believers, are the Church but it is more accurate to say that we are *members* of the Church. It is as if, as St Paul says, we are parts of the body – the different limbs, and so forth – and Christ is the Head (1 Cor 12:1-31; Col 1:18). In other words, the Catholic Church is a spiritual body, a supernatural reality. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is what gives life to the Church. The Holy Spirit's presence in the Church is the equivalent of God's grace giving life to our souls in our bodies. The Catholic Church is something much greater than the sum of its parts: She is no less than the Kingdom of God upon earth.

The Catholic Church is also a human institution, with the pope as Her head here on earth, acting as Christ's Vicar or deputy. The first pope was St Peter who received the power of the keys (that is, authority to teach and govern) directly from Our Lord Himself when He said, *'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven'* (Mt 16:18-19).

The membership of the Church is made up of sinners and saints alike. As a result, there are many heroes and heroines, and wonderful examples, in the history of the Church who show us what it is to be true sons and daughters of God. Yet there are also many sinful deeds in the Church's history, and in our own time. These may not be excused, but in themselves they do not invalidate either the supernatural reality of the Church nor Her mission, given to Her by Our Lord, to go and *'teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'* (Mt 28:20).

We say that there are four marks of the Church: She is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. (Because She is the Bride of Christ [Eph 5:25], the Church is referred to as She).

As the Catholic Church is the Kingdom of God upon earth, She

must be One, for *'a kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation'* (Lk 11:17). The Church must be Holy, having an all-holy Founder, and being founded to lead men to holiness: *'A glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, nor any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish'* (Eph 5:27). She must be Catholic (from the Greek word meaning universal) because She has been established to teach all nations, and to con-

Did you know...? When popes refer to themselves as 'We' they are not being pompous! Whilst it is true that mediæval monarchs referred to themselves as 'We,' and there is an echo of this when popes say 'We,' nevertheless the theological reason that popes say 'We' is because they are referring to themselves in union with all the other popes back to St Peter. In other words, no pope can teach anything without reference to his predecessors: he cannot teach something that is not consistent with what they have already taught. Each pope can only teach in continuity with what has been taught before.

tinue Our Lord's work of sanctification and salvation until the end of time. And She must be Apostolic in that Her doctrines and traditions must be those of the Apostles, and Her pastors must have come down from the Apostles in an unbroken succession.

It is because the Church is the continuation in time of the personal presence of Christ on earth that

the Church must do *all*, and may do *only*, that which Christ did on earth. Christ prayed, forgave sins, bestowed grace, taught the Truth, healed the sick, fed the hungry, comforted the bereaved, befriended the outcast, and offered sacrifice to the glory of God and for the sanctification and salvation of souls. Likewise, the Church today does all of these things, teaching what has been revealed in Scripture and through Tradition, and leading people by way of Calvary to the glory of the resurrection and eternal life.

To recap, Tradition with a capital T refers to those revealed truths handed down by the Apostles but not written down in the Scriptures. As St Paul says, *'Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned whether by word or by our epistle'* (2 Thess 2:14). These truths are handed down within the Church, and without interruption, in the writings of the Fathers, the Decrees of the Councils, and the rites of the Catholic Church.

From the Scriptures

'And [the Father] has subjected all things under {Christ's} feet, and has made Him head over all the church, which is His body, and the fulness of Him who is filled all in all' (Eph 2:22-23).

'And the things which thou hast heard of me by many witnesses, the same commend to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others also' (2 Tim 2:2).

From the Fathers of the Church

"The rule for right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation. Moreover... we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all' (St Vincent of Lérins).

From the Saints

'There is but one Church in which men find salvation, just as outside the ark of Noah it was not possible for anyone to be saved' (St Thomas Aquinas).

PRAYER FOR THE POPE

Ÿ Let us pray for our Holy Father, Pope N.

℞ May the Lord preserve him, give him life, and make him blessed upon the earth, and deliver him not up to the will of his enemies.

Let us pray: O God, Shepherd and Ruler of all Thy faithful people, in Thy mercy look upon Thy servant N. whom Thou hast appointed to preside over Thy Church, and grant, we beseech Thee, that both by word and example, he may edify those over whom he has charge, that he may reach life everlasting together with the flock entrusted to his care. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

10. OUR LADY AND THE SAINTS

IN SUMMARY

The Church consists of the Church Militant, Suffering, and Triumphant.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, is held in the highest affection by all Catholics and is venerated as our Queen and Mother.

Mary is perpetually a Virgin, the Mother of God, was immaculately conceived in her own mother's womb, and was assumed body and soul into heaven at the end of her life on earth.

The canonized saints of the Church are held up for our veneration, as models, and as intercessors who pray for us.

Patron saints are called upon in prayer to look after people, places, professions and trades, parishes, homes, and so forth.

As we have seen, the Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, the continuation in time of the personal presence of Our Lord on earth. But the members of this Mystical Body are not limited to the baptized faithful on earth. In fact, there are three tiers of the Church, if you like: the Church Militant, the Church Suffering, and the Church Triumphant. The Church Militant consists of all the baptized here on earth who, as soldiers of Christ, are fighting *against* sin and *for* all that is good, true, and beautiful. The Church Suffering is made up of all the Holy Souls in Purgatory, which we shall look at later. Here, we are concerned with the Church Triumphant which consists of all those '*who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb*' (Apoc 7:14). In other words, all those saints who now live eternally with God in heaven.

By virtue of the place awarded her by God Himself, the highest ranking person in heaven is the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. She is considered the Queen of Heaven and Queen of all the Angels and Saints, and our Queen also, as well as our Mother.

Filled with grace from the very moment of her conception in the womb of her mother, St Anne, she was preserved by God free from the stain of original sin and free from all actual sins throughout her life. As a result,

the integrity between her body and soul (that is, the right relationship between her passions and desires on the one hand and her rational soul on the other) was maintained throughout her life so that, when her life on earth ended, she was assumed body and soul together into heaven, unlike us whose bodies will die and see corruption and whose souls will be taken up to God to be judged when we die.

Did you know...? The oldest complete prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary is the *Sub Tuum*. The oldest surviving manuscript of this prayer is kept in the John Rylands Library in Manchester and dates back to the 3rd or 4th century. In English the prayer reads:

We fly to thy protection, O Holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

The Church has defined four dogmas concerning Our Blessed

Lady. First, she is perpetually a Virgin as well as being a Mother. Second, she is *Theotókos*, that is, the Mother of God. (The Greek word literally means God-bearer). Third, she was immaculately conceived in her own mother's womb and was filled with grace from the moment of her conception. And, fourth, at the end of her life on earth she was assumed body and soul into heaven.

As the Mother of our Saviour, who was given by her Son as He was dying on the Cross, to be our Mother also, (Jn 19:26-27), Mary is held in the very highest affection by Catholics and is venerated above all the angels and saints. Indeed, Catholics consider that it is not possible to speak too highly of her, and prayers to Our Blessed Lady trip easily off the tongues of Catholics around the world.

The Catholic Church's doctrine of the Communion of Saints means that all three tiers of the Church are united in one faith through the bond of grace which unites all those baptized into the Catholic Church who have not alienated themselves from the Church through sin or by turning their backs on God or His Church.

But those whom we commonly call saints are those who, having completed their lives on earth, are now enjoying the Beatific Vision in heaven, that is, the face of God. Many of these have been canonized by the Church. For someone to be canonized, he or she must be deemed by the Church to have lived a life of heroic virtue here on earth. Second, s/he would need to be worthy to be held up as a model of someone in his or her state of life, be that as a pope, a priest, a nun, a married or single woman, a monk, and so forth. And third, the Church would need to be able to attribute to that person two healing or medical miracles which had been prayed for by people still on earth. (In the case of a martyr – someone who has given his or her life for the Catholic Faith – proof of only one miracle is needed.) Yet there are many uncanonized saints: all those ordinary people who now enjoy eternal life in heaven but who have not been formally canonized by the Church.

Saints are venerated, especially but not only on their feast days, and Catholics pray to them, asking for their help in all manner of things. People, places, objects, professions, and many other things besides, are assigned patron saints who then pray for those needs.

From the Scriptures

'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women' (Lk 1:28)

'And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (Apoc 12:1)

From the Fathers of the Church

'The first thing that kindles ardour in learning is the greatness of the teacher. What is greater than the Mother of God? What more glorious than she whom glory itself chose? ...Mary, a virgin not only undefiled, but a virgin whom grace has made inviolate, free from every stain of sin' (St Ambrose)

From the Saints

'No matter how sinful one may have been, if he has devotion to Mary, it is impossible that he be lost' (St Hilary of Poitiers)

'If you greet her, she will answer you right away and converse with you' (St Bernadine of Siena)

TWO PRAYERS TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy! Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

11. GRACE AND THE SACRAMENTS

IN SUMMARY

There are two forms of grace: actual grace (an action upon the soul), and sanctifying grace (the indwelling in the soul of God's breath or life).

Grace comes to us chiefly through the Sacraments.

There are seven Sacraments:
Baptism,
Confession,
Holy Communion,
Confirmation,
Holy Matrimony,
Holy Orders, and
Extreme Unction (or Anointing of the Sick).

A Sacrament is:

'An outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to the soul.'

St Thomas Aquinas tells us that being in a state of grace on earth is like already having one foot in the glory of heaven.

The word 'grace' can be confusing because it seems to mean several different things. Basically, grace is an unmerited favour, a free gift from God, something wholly undeserved and unearned. Yet it also has specific meanings. In the traditional books on theology there are several different categories of grace, but in essence there are only two. (All the other categories matter, but they are subsets of the two main groups.) There is *actual grace* and there is *sanctifying grace*.

Actual grace is a reference to an action of God on one of His creatures. For example, someone who is beginning to believe in God and is thinking about becoming a Catholic is already benefiting from God's action on his or her soul as He slowly draws that person to Himself. Similarly, that nagging feeling in the back of the mind which is telling someone to get to Confession is the work of actual grace. Actual grace is like God pushing someone in the right direction, or drawing someone to Himself.

Sanctifying grace is the indwelling in the soul of the breath or life of God. When someone has sanctifying grace in his soul we say he is 'in a state of grace.' To be in a state of grace means that the soul is enjoying a stable state of being, that is, either someone is in a state of grace or he is not: it does not depend on how he feels, or even whether he *thinks* he is in a state of grace (unless he knows he has committed mortal sin).

When an infant is taken to church by his parents to be baptized, *actual grace* is at work on the baby through the actions of the parents. Once he has been baptized, *sanctifying grace* has been poured into his soul and he is then 'in a state of grace.'

Each of us is born without grace in his soul (with the exception of the Blessed Virgin Mary who was conceived 'full of grace'). We only receive sanctifying grace into our souls for the first time when we are

Did you know...? Properly speaking, grace is not a 'thing.' We cannot see, touch, taste, smell, or hear it. So, because sanctifying grace is rather an abstract quality, God Himself gives us many images to help us understand what it is and how it works. For example, in the Gospels Christ teaches us that sanctifying grace is a little bit like breath or new life (Jn 3:1-8), new and rich wine (Jn 2:1-10), fresh water (Jn 7:37-39), and sap running through the veins of a plant's branches (Jn 15:1-5).

baptized. The seven Sacraments are the chief means by which sanctifying grace is poured into our souls, and Baptism must be the first Sacrament received. No other Sacraments can be received until a person has been baptized.

The seven Sacraments are, Baptism, Confession, Holy Communion, Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction (or Anointing of the Sick). The same grace is poured into the soul through each Sacrament, but it accomplishes different ends depending on which Sacrament is given. This is a little bit like water: we can drink it, wash in it, or swim in it; it is the same water but different things are accomplished depending on the use to which it is put.

Christ Himself instituted each of the seven Sacraments whilst He was personally present on earth two thousand years ago. The Church cannot add to, or subtract from, the number seven. We shall look at each of the Sacraments below, but first we need to know what a Sacrament is.

The best definition, and one which is worth memorizing, is: *A Sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls.*

The *outward sign* refers to external actions, materials, words, and gestures which we can detect with our five senses. *Inward grace* means that grace in being given to us interiorly (into our souls). *Ordained by Jesus Christ* simply means that Christ instituted the Sacrament along with its external sign. And the phrase, *by which grace is given to our souls* means that it is the action of the outward sign itself – when performed correctly and according to the rites of the Church – which actually produces the inward, or interior, effect.

In addition, each Sacrament is made up of both *form* and *matter*. In this context, *form* means the words used by the priest and the priest's intentions when he confers a Sacrament. The *matter* is a reference to the materials (for example, water, oil, bread, wine) and the gestures of the priest (for example, making the Sign of the Cross). The Sacraments can only be administered by a validly ordained minister (deacon, priest, or bishop, although there are a couple of curious exceptions).

From the Scriptures

'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth... And of His fulness we all have received, and grace for grace. For the Law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ' (Jn 1:14, 16-17).

From the Fathers of the Church

'With Baptism, the gift is bestowed through what is a tangible thing: water. But what is accomplished is intellectually perceived: the rebirth and the renewal'

'The Sacraments are the means by which we receive grace from God. They are necessary for salvation'

(St John Chrysostom).

From the Saints

'Oh! Could you but see the beauty of a soul in the grace of God' (St Mary Magdalene de Pazzi).

'All is grace' (St Thérèse of Lisieux).

A PRAYER FOR GOD'S GRACE, AND FOR CONFORMITY WITH GOD'S WILL

Grant me Thy grace, most merciful Jesus, that it may be with me and work with me, and preserve me even to the end. Grant that I may always desire and will that which is most acceptable and most dear to Thee. Let Thy will be mine, and let my will ever follow Thine, and agree with it perfectly. Let my willing, and my not-willing, be all one with Thine, and let me will or not-will anything else but what Thou will or what Thou will-not.

(from the Imitation of Christ)

12. BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

IN SUMMARY

Baptism is the first of the seven Sacraments to be received, and is necessary for salvation (Jn 3:5).

In Baptism, the stain of original sin is washed away; the soul is filled with sanctifying grace and we are made partakers of the divine life; we are made children of God and members of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church; the virtues of faith, hope, and charity are infused into the soul; and the soul is marked with an indelible character.

In Confirmation, we receive the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Wisdom

Understanding

Counsel

Fortitude

Knowledge

Piety

Fear of the Lord

(Is 11:2-3)

'Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' (Jn 3:5). With these words Our Lord makes it abundantly clear that to get to heaven it is necessary to have been baptized. But why? And what about all those good people who do no harm but have not been baptized?

First, Baptism is necessary because God Himself says so. Second, the human race has been alienated from God through sin (Adam's original sin and our actual sins). If we are to go to heaven we must first be reconciled to God, and Baptism is the first and chief means by which this reconciliation takes place. Third, without God's grace, we can only exist and live on a *natural* level: nothing we do can have any eternal merit. However, when we are baptized we are initiated into the *supernatural* life of God, and, as St Peter tells us, we are *'made partakers of the divine nature'* (2 Peter 1:4). To be in heaven means, by definition, that we are *fully* united to God and incorporated into His life. The moment our life on earth ends is the cut-off point, as it were, after which we cannot influence our own destiny. So, we must already be partakers in the divine life, and be part of God's supernatural world, *before* we die – and already have one foot in heaven, as St Thomas Aquinas tells us – if we are to be sharers in God's life *after* we die, and for all eternity.

A priest baptizes by pouring water over the head of the person to be baptized (adult or child) and saying the words, 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.'

The Sacrament of Baptism is considered to have been instituted by Christ at the moment of His baptism in the River Jordan by St John the Baptist.

There are several effects of Baptism. First, it washes away the stain of original sin, and remits (cancels) the punishment due to original sin, that is, eternal death in hell, and remits the punishment due to any sins in an adult that he has committed prior to being baptized. Second, the soul is filled with sanctifying grace, and raises us up to become *'partakers in the divine life'* and sharers in the supernatural reality of God's world. Third, it unites us to Christ and makes us members of His Mystical Body, the Church, and we become co-heirs with Christ to the Kingdom of Heaven. Fourth, it infuses into our souls the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity,

along with the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. And, fifth, it imprints on our souls an indelible character, or seal, which marks the soul with an ineradicable likeness to Christ. It is because of this seal that Baptism may only be received once.

Being baptized grants us certain privileges, for example, a baptized Catholic is entitled to participate in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church, as well as Her rites and ceremonies, unless he has forfeited this right somehow. But being baptized also imposes certain demands and responsibilities, for example, Catholics must go to Mass every single Sunday and on named Holy Days of Obligation; observe the precepts of the Church; and live a life of virtue in accordance with the Ten Commandments and the teachings of the Church, which includes teaching their children (if they have children) to love God and the things of God and to bring them up as Catholics.

The Sacrament of Confirmation complements the Sacrament of Baptism, although it is not usually administered to infants. It is the sacrament of spiritual maturity (which may not coincide with physical, emotional, or psychological maturity)

Did you know..? As well as Baptism by water there is also Baptism by desire and Baptism by blood. Someone who already has faith and is preparing to be baptized (that is, a catechumen) but dies before actually being baptized, is deemed to have received Baptism by desire. Someone who dies a martyr's death, even if he has not been baptized, is deemed to have received Baptism by blood.

whereby someone is strengthened to become a soldier of Christ (2 Tim 2:3) and a witness to the Gospel. Far from being the moment when a candidate commits his life to God, as some people think, Confirmation is when God confirms in us the works He has already wrought in us in Baptism (Ps 67:29). Like Baptism, Confirmation seals, or imprints, us with an indelible mark, rendering us yet more like to Christ. Also like Baptism, the Sacrament of Confirmation cannot be repeated. In Confirmation, the candidate receives the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit fitting him with the strength, courage, light, and sanctifying grace necessary to serve Almighty God, and His Church, in his new role.

From the Scriptures

'And [Paul] said to them, Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed? But they said to him, We have not so much as heard that there be a Holy Spirit... And when Paul had imposed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them' (Acts 19:2,6).

From the Fathers of the Church

'In the name of the same Christ, are not hands laid upon the baptized persons among them, for the reception of the Holy Spirit?' (St Cyprian of Carthage).

From the Saints

'O Holy Spirit, descend plentifully into my heart. Enlighten the dark corners of this neglected dwelling and scatter there Thy cheerful beams' (St Augustine).

'It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world' (St Aloysius Gonzaga).

'Prayer is the best armour we have: it is the key which opens the heart of God' (St Pio of Pietrelcina).

SIMPLE ACTS OF FAITH, HOPE, & CHARITY

AN ACT OF FAITH – O my God, I believe in You and all that Your Church teaches, because You have said it, and Your word is true.

AN ACT OF HOPE – O my God, I hope in You for grace and for glory, because of Your promises, Your mercy, and Your power.

AN ACT OF CHARITY – O my God, because You are so good, I love You with all my heart, and for Your sake I love my neighbour as myself.

13. CONFESSION AND PENANCE

IN SUMMARY

The Sacrament of Confession is the 'second plank' for those who sin after they have been baptized, that is, all of us.

Penitents must: name their sins, be sorry for their sins and make a firm purpose of amendment, and do penance. The priest gives a penance and administers absolution.

Penance in general involves individuals co-operating with God's grace in order to play their part in their own salvation because, as St Augustine said, 'God created us without us, but He did not will to save us without us.'

Extreme Unction, or Anointing of the Sick, is the second of the penitential Sacraments.

As the whole point of the Catholic religion is the reconciliation of sinners to the holy and undivided Trinity, the Sacrament of Baptism may be said to be the single most important event in our lives. Yet we can only be baptized once. So, what happens if we sin after we have been baptized (and we all do)? How, then, might we be saved? If we think of the Fall of mankind as a shipwreck, then Baptism is the lifeboat that saves us, but the Sacrament of Confession may be thought of as a 'second plank,' as some of the Fathers of the Church called it, especially Tertullian. In the Sacrament of Confession (also called the Sacrament of Penance or of Reconciliation) any sins we have committed since being baptized may be absolved. Confession offers us a second and a third chance. Indeed, it offers us '*seventy times seven*' chances (Mt 18:22).

Why do we have to go to Confession? Why cannot we simply say sorry to God in the secret of our hearts? First, because God Himself ordained that this is how things should be when Our Lord breathed the power of the Holy Spirit onto His Apostles and gave them the sacramental power to forgive sins (Jn 20:22-23). Second, because when we sin we not only offend God, we also add to the general rupture between the Creator and the whole human race. In other words, our sins affect everyone else negatively (just as our acts of virtue affect everyone else positively) so we need to say sorry not only to God but to a priest who represents the whole of God's Church. (In the early days of the Church's history, people confessed their sins before everyone else, out loud. At least we are no longer called upon to do that!) Third, by naming – or confessing – our sins, we can no longer hide them, as Adam tried to hide behind a tree after he had sinned (Gen 3:8). As the saints tell us, when we go to Confession we should name our most shameful or embarrassing sins first so that the devil loses his hold over us.

Before we go to Confession we need to carry out an *examination of conscience* so that we can identify, and therefore be penitent for, the sins we have committed. In the Sacrament of Confession we must fulfil three requirements. First, we must name our sins (we must name all of our mortal sins, and we do well to name all of our venial sins as well as our imperfections). Second, we must be penitent, that is, we must be sorry for them. There are two types of sorrow: *attrition* (or imperfect contrition) whereby we fear the consequences of our sins; and *contrition* (or perfect contrition)

whereby we are sorry for having offended God's goodness and holiness. As part of our penitence, we must make a *firm purpose of amendment*, that is, we must firmly resolve not to commit these sins again. Third, we must do penance. The penance we are given in the Sacrament of Confession is likely to be a prayer, or a few prayers, which we already know by rote. But there is more to penance than this.

Doing penance means making satisfaction for – making up for – our sins. Only Christ Himself, in His death on the Cross, can make satisfaction for our sins, yet paradoxically, as St Paul says, we must make up in our own sufferings for what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24). What could possibly have been missing in the sufferings of Christ? *We* were missing on Calvary! St Augustine said, 'God created us without us, but He did not will to save us without us.' In other words, we must co-operate with God's grace if we wish to benefit from God's grace. Penance is the chief means by which we play our part in the forgiveness of our own sins. Once we have confessed our sins in the Sacrament of Confession, the priest will give us absolution. All sins were forgiven on the Cross, but when we are absolved in

Did you know..? The definition of sin is *an offence against God*. When we sin, the scales of divine justice become imbalanced because we fail to give to God what is due to Him, what we owe Him. Making satisfaction for sins involves correcting this imbalance until God has been given what is due to Him as God, and the scales of divine justice are balanced once again.

Confession the gift of forgiveness is handed out to the individual penitent or, as we say, the merits of Christ's redeeming death are applied to individual souls.

The Sacrament of Extreme Unction, also known as the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, is the second penitential Sacrament. It may be administered to those who are diagnosed terminally sick, whose health takes a significant decline during the course of their terminal sickness, and those on their deathbed. It offers the grace of comfort and consolation, which in turn can sometimes aid physical recovery, and it incorporates the healing of the soul (forgiveness) even though, if physically possible, the sick person should go to Confession before being anointed.

From the Scriptures

'As I live, says the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live' (Ezechiel 33:11).

'And [Jesus] answering, said to them, Think you that these Galileans were sinners above all the men of Galilee because they suffered such things? No, I say to you. But unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish' (Lk 13:2-3).

From the Fathers of the Church

'It is necessary to confess our sins to those to whom the dispensation of God's mysteries has been entrusted' (St Basil of Cæsarea)

From the Saints

'Confession heals, confession justifies, confession grants pardon of sin, all hope consists in confession, in confession there is a chance of mercy' (St Isidore of Seville).

'Go to your confessor, open your heart to him, display to him all the recesses of your soul' (St Francis de Sales).

TWO ACTS OF CONTRITION

O my God, because You are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against You, and by the help of Your grace I will not to sin again.

O my God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins, and detest them above all things, because they deserve Your dreadful punishments, because they have crucified my loving Saviour Jesus Christ, and, most of all, because they offend Your infinite goodness; and I firmly resolve, by the help of Your grace, never to offend You again, and carefully to avoid the occasions of sin. Amen.

14. THE MASS

IN SUMMARY

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the continuation in time of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross on Calvary.

The four ends of His sacrifice, and the four ends of the Mass are exactly the same: *latreutic* (praise and adoration), *eucharistic* (thanksgiving), *propitiatory* (making satisfaction for sins), and *impetratory* (an efficacious means of obtaining God's blessings and graces).

Through the miracle of *transubstantiation*, the Bread and Wine are consecrated at Mass and become the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity, of Christ Himself.

Therefore we worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament with the highest level of adoration, namely *latria* (from the Greek, meaning 'worship'), the true worship and honour given to God alone.

The Mass takes pride of place in the Catholic religion. It is the jewel in the crown of the Catholic Faith. It is impossible to overstate the importance, value, and sacredness of the Mass. With the Mass, we have everything. Without the Mass, we have nothing.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the continuation in time of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, on Calvary, two thousand years ago. So, to understand the Mass, we must understand Calvary.

Christ is fully Man. As a result, in His work of redemption He offers to the Father the gift that our fallen human race has signally failed to offer to God. At the same time, because Christ is also fully God, His gift to the Father on our behalf is of infinite merit, which means that the gift of human nature that He offers to the Father is raised to a supernatural level and is afforded an eternal value.

In His death on the Cross, Christ accomplishes *four ends*. First, He offers the supreme gift of praise and adoration to the Godhead. Second, He raises up the perfect offering of thanks to the Creator. Third, Christ offers the perfect act of satisfaction to set right the divine scales of justice which have become imbalanced by our sins. And, fourth, He obtains for us all the spiritual blessings of the heavenly places (Eph 1:3), buying back for us (or ransoming) the gifts forfeited by Adam at the Fall.

Being fully God and fully Man, Christ is the mediator between God and Man (Hebrews 9:15), between the Creator and a fallen race of creatures. He is the go-between, the pontifex, the bridge-builder.

As the Anointed One, Christ is both the Priest who offers the sacrifice and He is the Victim that is offered, the Lamb without blemish (Jn 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19; see also Hebrews).

When Our Lord, at the Last Supper, commanded His Apostles to do this '*for a commemoration of me... unto remission of sins*' (Lk 22:19; Mt 26:28), He was both ordaining His first priests and bestowing upon them the sacramental power to continue His work of atonement through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In doing so, He made each of them sacramentally an *alter Christus*, 'another Christ.' This sacramental power to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is passed on through the

laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). This 'passing on' is called the Apostolic Succession.

When a priest says Mass, then, he is continuing sacramentally what Our Lord instituted at the Last Supper. Which brings us back to the question of what the Mass is. The Mass certainly has a meal aspect to it insofar as Bread and Wine are consecrated to become the Body and Blood of Christ and are then consumed. Yet the Mass is not a meal, but a Sacred Banquet. Nor is the Mass about the gathering or assembly of God's people. After all, a Mass may be offered with no one but the priest present. Rather, the Mass is the union of the Bride (Christ's Church) with the Lamb that was slain (Christ). In other words, the banquet is that of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb and is both a foretaste of and a participation in the glory of heaven (Apoc 19:7-9). But both the Last Supper, which preceded Calvary, and the Banquet of the Lamb, which follows on in eternity, draw their efficacy from the Crucifixion and death of Christ, and the pouring forth of blood and water from His pierced side (Jn 19:34). It is from this pouring forth that all the graces of all the Sacraments flow forth.

Did you know..? The four ends of the Mass are exactly the same as the four ends of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. Namely, *latreutic*: a sacrifice of praise and adoration; *eucharistic*: a sacrifice of thanksgiving; *propitiatory*: a making satisfaction for sins; and *impetratory*: an efficacious means of asking for and obtaining God's blessings and graces.

In other words, it is the action of Calvary that is continued in time whenever and wherever the Mass is offered.

The chief fruit of the Mass, coming forth as a flower from the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), is the Blessed Sacrament. This is the name we give to the Sacred Host and to the Precious Blood of Christ once the miracle of *transubstantiation* has taken place, and the Bread and Wine have become the Body and the Blood, the Soul and the Divinity, of Christ Himself, leaving no trace of the Bread and Wine in its wake except for the appearances (what we call the 'accidents') that can be detected by the five senses. After this moment of consecration during the Mass, truly we have before us the most sublimely beautiful and sacred gift this side of heaven.

From the Scriptures

'Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you... After [hearing] this many of His disciples went back, and walked with Him no more' (Jn 6:54, 67).

From the Fathers of the Church

'It is no longer permitted us to raise doubts about the true nature of the Body and Blood, for, according to the statement of the Lord Himself as well as our Faith, this is indeed flesh and blood' (St Hilary).

From the Saints

'The Mass is the most holy act of religion; you can do nothing that can give greater glory to God or be more profitable for your soul than to hear Mass both frequently and devoutly. It is the favourite devotion of the saints' (St Peter Julian Eymard).

'If angels could be jealous of men, they would be so for one reason: Holy Communion' (St Maximilian Kolbe).

TWO PRAYERS IN HONOUR OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

O SACRUM CONVIVIUM: O sacred banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

ANIMA CHRISTI: Soul of Christ, be my sanctification; Body of Christ, fill all my veins; Water of Christ's side, wash out my stains; Passion of Christ, my comfort be; O good Jesus, listen to me; In Thy wounds I fain would hide; Ne'er to be parted from Thy side; Guard me, should the foe assail me; Call me when my life shall fail me; Bid me come to Thee above, With Thy saints to sing Thy love. World without end. Amen.

15. HOLY MATRIMONY

IN SUMMARY

Marriage, instituted by God from the beginning, was elevated to become a Sacrament at the Marriage Feast of Cana.

The two *ends* of marriage are procreation and union.

The three *goods* of marriage are offspring, life-long fidelity, and the sacrament itself.

The conjugal act is reserved to that between a husband and wife within the context of marriage where the possibility of bringing forth new life is not expressly excluded.

The family is the foundation and basic building block of society.

Parents are the first educators of their children, particularly and chiefly with regard to all things relating to the Catholic Faith.

The institution of marriage goes back a long time before Christ raised it to become a Sacrament at the Marriage Feast in Cana (Jn 2:1-11). From the beginning God created them, male and female in a perfect complementarity,

with the two specific purposes of increasing, multiplying, and filling the earth (Gen 1:28) and of companionship (Gen 2:18). These are the two ends of marriage: procreation and union. Note that God's very first commandment to His new creatures concerned the procreative end of marriage. There are many types of love, for example, between parents and children, between siblings, between grandparents and grandchildren, between friends, and so forth, but none of these involve procreation. Rather, human sexuality was created by God so that the human race might become collaborators in God's work of creation by bringing new life into the world.

The sexual drive in human beings is so strong because it is the furnace from which we are all made and precisely because it involves a participation in God's mighty power of creation. Of course, we cannot create life *ex nihilo*, 'out of nothing,' as God can. Nonetheless, bringing new life into being is a powerfully creative force.

With the Fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, man's desires and passions, which had been kept in check by the rational soul, suffered a fragmentation from the powers of the soul. From that moment onwards, concupiscence (from the Latin meaning 'to desire with force') has tended to run riot, and only the power of God's grace, infused into our souls in the Sacraments and strengthened by our practising the virtues, can bring it back under control.

Far from regarding all things sexual as bad, as the popular imagination seems to think, the Catholic Church regards human sexuality as a sacred participation in the work of God's creation. As a result – and because of the ease with which we can go astray in this area – the Church girds it about with rites

Did you know..? It was at the Marriage Feast in Cana that Our Lord instituted marriage as a Sacrament. By changing water into wine, Our Lord elevated a *natural* institution to become a *supernatural* institution. The water symbolizes human union and complementarity. The wine represents the infusion of the richness of God's grace, and the raising up of marriage to be a participation in the life and holiness of God Himself.

and rituals, with solemn vows and strict codes of behaviour. Therefore, all sexual acts – other than conjugal acts between a man and wife that are ordered to, or at least open to, procreation – are deemed to be contrary to the will of God and therefore sinful.

The companionship within marriage mirrors the mutual and eternal *giving* within the Blessed Trinity, where each Person exists solely to give Himself wholly and without reserve to another. So, whereas the procreative end of marriage is a participation in God's work of creation, the unitive aspect is a participation in the internal economy (the interior workings) of the Trinity. This union between husband and wife, then, is sacred as the life of the Trinity is sacred. In other words, marriage is a participation in God's holiness. This truth – along with the simple command of Our Lord that what *'God has joined together, let no man put asunder'* (Mt 19:6) – is why there can be no divorce in the Catholic Church.

St Augustine listed the three *goods* of marriage as children, fidelity, and the sacrament. First, marriage is ordered chiefly towards procreation and bringing new life into the world. Parents have the principal responsibility for educating their children in the ways of the Catholic Faith, and may not abdicate this responsibility in favour of priests, catechists, or other teachers, even though others may assist, of course. Second, marriage is ordered towards the faithful and life-long companionship of the man and wife, 'till death do us part.' Third, although the institute of marriage predates marriage as a Sacrament, nonetheless the sacramental bond, formed in and by God's grace bestowed in the Sacrament of Matrimony, is what elevates the institute of marriage to a participation in the supernatural reality of divine life.

Whilst all seven Sacraments bestow grace for the good of the person receiving them, marriage is particularly ordered to the good of others, namely one's spouse. The Sacrament of marriage involves a three-way process: God gives His grace to each partner for him or her to pass it onto to his or her spouse, and to help the spouse grow in holiness and arrive safely in heaven. One of the chief tasks of a married couple is, as it were, to get each other into heaven, taking their children and grandchildren with them on their spiritual coat-tails we might say.

From the Scriptures

'Therefore now they are not two but one flesh' (Mt 19:6).

'But thou hast kept the good wine until now' (Jn 2:10).

'For whosoever thou shalt go, I will go; and where thou shalt dwell, I also will dwell. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God' (Ruth 1:16).

From the Fathers of the Church

'When a husband and wife are united in marriage they no longer seem like something earthly, but rather like the image of God Himself' (St John Chrysostom).

From the Saints

'The greater the friendship, the more solid and long-lasting the marriage will be, as we are united not only in flesh but in domestic activity' (St Thomas Aquinas)

'Those who are called to the married state will, with the grace of God, find within their state everything they need to be holy' (St Josemaría Escrivá).

TWO EXTRACTS FROM A PRAYER TO THE SACRED HEART FOR MARRIED COUPLES

O Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, King and centre of all hearts, dwell in our hearts and be our King: grant us by Thy grace to love each other truly and chastely, even as Thou hast loved Thine immaculate Bride, the Church, and didst deliver Thyself up for her... Grant, O Lord, that between us there may be a constant and holy rivalry in our efforts to lead a truly Christian life, by virtue of which the divine image of Thy mystic union with Thy Holy Church, which Thou didst deign to impress upon us on the happy day of our marriage, may shine forth more and more clearly; and so living may we, both of us, ascend into heaven and be found worthy to praise Thee and bless Thee forever. Amen.

16. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

IN SUMMARY

The Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses on Mt Sinai, still form the bedrock of Christian law and living.

Our Lord came to fulfil the law, not to abolish it.

The Ten Commandments govern our conduct towards God and towards our neighbour, laying the foundation for a life of virtue.

To be free means not to be free from all restraint, for that would be libertinism, but to be free to love God and the things of God without let or hindrance.

Each of the Ten Commandments covers more than is stated in the headline statement.

Each of the Commandments enjoins upon us duties and responsibilities as well as forbidding certain things.

Moral law does not permit us to do wrong so that good may come of it.

The Ten Commandments are the bedrock of Christian Law. Far from being superseded by anything Our Lord said in the New Testament, Christ in fact came to fulfil the Law (Mt 5:17). In general, we do not like being commanded to do, or not to do, anything. We prefer to decide for ourselves what is right and good for us, and what is not. After all, are we not adults and capable of thinking for ourselves? But that was the sin of Adam, namely, thinking he could decide for himself what constituted good and evil instead of following the Maker's instructions.

While we may think that being free means having the liberty to do whatever we want, in fact being free means possessing the faculty and the space, as it were, to grow to be the person whom God created us to be. The drug addict becomes less free to do as he wishes with each injection, not more free. So, too, with sin: each sin limits our freedom not to sin next time. If we look to anyone other than to God for true freedom and interior peace and happiness then we shall be forever disappointed. Rather, as St Augustine said, 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts shall not rest until they rest in Thee.' The Ten Commandments are our roadmap to true freedom in God.

The Ten Commandments are:

1. I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven thing, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not adore them nor serve them.
2. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
3. Remember that thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day.
4. Honour thy father and thy mother.
5. Thou shalt not kill.
6. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
7. Thou shalt not steal.
8. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
9. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.

Although most of the Commandments are worded in the negative (Thou shalt not...) in fact they enjoin upon us certain duties as well as forbid us to do certain things. For example, we are commanded in the first Commandment to love and serve the Lord our God and to worship Him in faith, hope,

charity, and religion. As a subset of justice, religion is the virtue whereby we render to God all that is due to Him, all that we owe Him. In contrast, we may not make any images to be adored or honoured. (The modern cult of the personality and celebrity comes pretty close to this!) Nor may we give to anyone or anything else that which should properly be given to God.

Each of the Commandments covers more than just the headline statement. For example, the second Commandment does not only forbid the blasphemous use of the Holy Name of God or of Jesus Christ (including the phrase sometimes abbreviated to OMG), it also forbids the use of all expletives. The third Commandment commands us as Catholics to go to Mass on every single Sunday

of the year as well as named Holy Days of Obligation. (Being on holiday, attending a sporting event, either as a participant or as an observer, going to some other church service instead, or being hungover from

Did you know..? The first three Commandments relate to how we should conduct ourselves with regard to God whilst the remaining seven relate to our conduct towards our neighbour. Our Lord sums them up in the Two Great Commandments upon which depend the whole law and the prophets (Mt 22:37-40).

the night before, does not excuse us from this obligation!) The fourth Commandment enjoins on us respect for, and obedience to, all who have legitimate authority over us. The fifth Commandment forbids sins of anger, rage, impatience, and so forth. The sixth and ninth Commandments enjoin on us a life of chastity and purity in deed and in thought respectively. The seventh and tenth Commandments cover all acts and thoughts, respectively, of stealing or wrongful keeping or possession of what does not belong to us, including envy and jealousy. And the eighth covers all acts of dishonesty, false testimony, rash judgement, and lies.

Bear in mind that there is no such thing in the Church's moral teaching as a white lie because we are forbidden to do wrong that good may come of it.

The Catholic Faith incorporates not just what we believe but how we worship God and how we behave towards self and neighbour.

From the Scriptures

'By what does a young man correct his way? by observing thy words. With my whole heart have I sought after Thee; let me not stray from Thy commandments. Thy words I have hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee' (Ps 118:9-11).

From the Fathers of the Church

'God does not command impossibilities but by commanding, admonishes you, Do what you can and pray for what you cannot, and aids you that you may be able' (St Augustine).

From the Saints

'The Holy Spirit sweetens the yoke of the divine law and lightens its weight so that we may observe God's commandments with the greatest of ease and even with pleasure' (St Lawrence of Brindisi).

'Everyone knows that the first effect of love is imitation' (St Charles de Foucauld).

HEAR, O ISRAEL

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength. And these words which I command you this day shall be in thy heart. And thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

17. THE LIFE OF VIRTUE

IN SUMMARY

Virtues are habits of, or dispositions to, good and right conduct.

The infused virtues are given to us directly by God at Baptism.

Acquired virtues are gained through a continual process of practising them.

Natural virtues are good in themselves but on their own they do not guarantee us a place in heaven.

Grace usually works on what we give God for Him to work on, rather than in a sort of spiritual vacuum.

Grace elevates and perfects our naturally acquired virtues so that they may gain a supernatural value and an eternal merit.

The life of virtue is not an optional extra for the Christian. Rather, it is the putting into practice of the beliefs we profess in our prayers and the Church's liturgy.

If a man is routinely impatient but on one particular occasion exercises patience, we cannot say that he is suddenly a patient man. Rather, we say that he has exercised patience on one particular occasion. Virtue does not consist of occasional acts of goodness. Instead, virtue is a habit, a disposition towards a particular good behaviour, whilst a vice is an habitual practice of sinful behaviour. Sometimes, when we have practised a natural skill such as learning to drive, we say that driving has become second nature to us. A virtue (or a vice) is the spiritual or supernatural equivalent of this. If hope, or patience, or justice have become second nature to us then they have become virtues in us. (By contrast, if swearing, or drunkenness, or impatience have become second nature to us, then they have become vices in us.)

There are *natural virtues* and *supernatural virtues*. A man might be evenly tempered, habitually sober in character, gentle, patient, and may seem to require no effort in these areas. In which case we say he has – at least some of – the natural virtues. Yet if he does not believe in God, or pays no regard to God, and fails to give to God what is His due, then the man's natural virtues alone will not guarantee him a place in heaven. 'But,' someone might cry, 'surely Our Lord said, As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me?' (Mt 25:40). Indeed He did. It is absolutely necessary for Catholics to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit prisoners. These charitable works are not optional extras for Catholics: they form an integral part of our beliefs and practice. Yet even these actions, whilst necessary, are not sufficient on their own to attain to the glory of heaven. Why is that?

To get to heaven, our souls must be transformed to the likeness of Christ – chiefly in Baptism, but also through prayer, good works, and penance – and we must be elevated to a supernatural level of existence and participate in the life of God. That is, we must be in a state of grace. '*Be not conformed to this world, but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect*' (Rom 12:2). Here, as well as talking about reforming our behaviour, St Paul is also, and chiefly, referring to the need for our minds, our souls, to be reformed, to be made anew, in the likeness of what is good, acceptable [to the Father], and perfect. In other words, by the power of God's grace we must '*put on the new man*' (Eph 4:24; Rom 13:14) and be re-formed to the likeness of Christ.

In other words, we must not only behave like Christ, we must be conformed to the likeness of Christ by the power of His grace. But grace does not work in a vacuum, so we must give God our virtues so that His grace has something to raise up and perfect.

The virtues may also be divided into the *infused virtues* and the *acquired virtues*. The *three theological virtues* of faith, hope, and charity (1 Cor 13:13), as well as the *four cardinal virtues* of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (Wis 8:7), are all infused into our souls at the moment of Baptism.

The theological virtues are so called because they come from, and are directly related to, God. They enable us to believe God's Truth without doubting, to trust in His goodness and promises with confidence, and to love all that is true and good and beautiful: in short, to love the Divine perfections of our Creator.

Did you know..? The late Dominican priest, Fr Herbert McCabe, said that a virtue makes it easier for you to do what you want to do, whereas a vice makes it harder for you not to do what you do not want to do.

The cardinal virtues (from the Latin meaning hinge) are those upon which all of the other moral virtues hang. *Prudence* enlightens our mind and points out the

most effectual means for carrying out the work of salvation. (Acquired virtues associated with prudence include discretion, vigilance, circumspection, and docility.) *Justice* is the virtue by which we give to God and our neighbour all that is owed to them. (Religion being the subset of justice, as we have seen, by which we give to God what we owe to God. Acquired virtues associated with justice include filial piety, obedience to lawful authority, gratitude, respect, and truthfulness.) *Fortitude* gives us the strength to overcome the difficulties which we face as we try to live a life of virtue and holiness. (Acquired virtues associated with fortitude include confidence, courage, firmness of purpose, magnanimity, patience, and perseverance.) And *temperance* enables us to moderate, according to the dictates of reason and religion, the desires and passions of our fallen nature. (Associated virtues include abstinence, sobriety, modesty, continency, and chastity.)

Finally, *acquired virtues* refer to all of those which we can only acquire as a result of continual practice. If we wish to become a concert pianist, we must practise continually. If we wish to become saints, we must practise the virtues continually.

From the Scriptures

'Therefore if you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God... [put away] anger, indignation, malice, blasphemy, filthy speech out of your mouth... Put ye on therefore... mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another... But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection' (Col 3:1,8,12,13).

From the Fathers of the Church

'Virtue is not the knowing of good and evil. Rather, virtue is the doing of good and not-doing of evil' (Lactantius).

'When it is asked whether someone is a good man, it is not asked what he believes or what he hopes for, but what he loves' (St Augustine)

From the Saints

'Virtue demands courage, constant effort, and above all, help from on high' (St John Vianney).

True virtue has no limits, but goes on and on, and especially holy charity, which is the virtue of virtues' (St Francis de Sales).

A MORNING OFFERING

O my God, I offer to Thee all my thoughts, words, actions, and sufferings, and I beseech Thee to give me Thy grace, that I may not offend Thee this day, but that I may faithfully serve Thee and do Thy holy will in all things.

18. PRAYER

IN SUMMARY

Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God.

Prayer may also be defined as ‘practising the presence of God.’

Prayer is as vital to our spiritual lives as water is to the growth of a plant.

Prayer is chiefly something God does in our souls rather than something we do. When we pray, we tune-in to something God is already doing within us.

A stable routine of prayer is important for the spiritual life in part because it helps to carry us through those moments when we do not feel like praying, or when we would otherwise be too busy, or when we are troubled and not minded to pray.

Above all, we must persevere in prayer come what may because prayer is our lifeline to God.

Although this topic comes towards the end of this booklet, in fact prayer is singularly important. Nothing else works without prayer. Even the seed of sanctifying grace planted in our souls in the Sacraments will bear little or no fruit unless it is watered with prayer. So, what is prayer and why is it so important?

Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God. Here, *mind* means our thoughts arising from our rational souls. We must direct our thoughts to God and lift our souls to Him. We must allow our minds to be filled with His presence so that our every thought, word, and deed begins with Him and has Him as its end.

In this context, *heart* means not the centre of our feelings and affections but the source of our acts of the will. Love is chiefly something we do, not something we feel. Remember, to love means to give. Prayer, then, involves raising the seat of our acts of the will to God. Prayer means giving our will, our acts and intentions, to God.

Prayer is also described by Brother Lawrence (a seventeenth century Carmelite) as ‘the practice of the presence of God’ by which he, and other saints, mean placing ourselves continually in the presence of God throughout the day, and continually calling to mind that we are in God’s presence, so that everything we do is rooted in God and finds its fulfilment in Him. For Br Lawrence prayer means, every moment of the day, living the reality of St Paul’s words when he says, ‘*In [God] we live, and move, and are*’ (Acts 17:28).

Yet prayer is even more elemental than that.

The Blessed Trinity comprises three Divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have seen how the Father begets the Son, who is a perfect image of the Father, equal to Him in all things. The Father breathes forth His breath of life into the Son. The Son reciprocates, breathing the same breath of life into the Father. This breath is the Holy Spirit, who is both the Gift being given by the Father and the Son, and the Giver of Life to the Father and the Son.

Throughout eternity, this reciprocal breathing of life, back and forth, from Father to Son and from Son to Father, *is prayer*. This rhythmic and reciprocal divine breathing-forth within the life of the Blessed Trinity is what prayer is.

When we are in a state of grace, we have the presence of the breath and life of God within us in the form of sanctifying grace and we have become *'partakers of the divine nature'* (2 Peter 1:4). But this means that the rhythmic and reciprocal divine breathing-forth of life is present within our souls. In other words, prayer is, chiefly, something that God does within us, rather than something we do. When we pray, we are simply tuning into – logging into or accessing – this rhythmic and reciprocal divine breathing-forth of life.

When we go to Mass, when we say the rosary or our Morning Offering or Evening Examination of Conscience and Acts of Thanksgiving and Contrition, when we light a candle in church, when we pray the Stations of the Cross or attend Benediction, when we practise *lectio divina*, or meditation or contemplation, or simply compose our private thoughts into a prayer in the depths of our hearts, we are tuning into – participating in – the rhythmic and reciprocal divine breathing-forth of life within the Blessed Trinity that is already happening in our souls.

St Paul describes this action of prayer within us perfectly when he writes, *'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words'* (Rom 8:26, RSV translation). And we even hear Our Lord sighing or groaning audibly in prayer as when He heals the man who is deaf and dumb: *'And taking him from the multitude apart, He put His fingers into his ears, and spitting He touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven, He groaned and said, Ephpheta, which is, Be thou opened'* (Mk 7:33-34).

(Of course, if we are not in a state of grace, we can still pray. In which case, what is happening is that we are being moved by God's actual grace – His prompting – by and towards the Divine Life in which He wills us to participate.)

The routine and set prayers of the Church enable us to participate with the whole Communion of Saints in the same rhythmic and reciprocal breathing-forth whilst our private interior prayers help to deepen our own breathing in union with God. So it is not a case of either/or – public *or* private prayer – but that we need both/and.

Did you know..? There are four A.C.T.S. of prayer: **A**doration, **C**ontrition, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication. All prayers, whether public and formal or private and informal, fall under one or more of these headings.

From the Scriptures

'How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord' (Ps 83:2).

From the Fathers of the Church

'The steadfast purpose of heart which we should constantly aspire after is that the soul may ever cleave to God and to heavenly things' (St John Cassian).

'Pray continually... by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer' (Pope St Leo the Great).

From the Saints

'Holy Spirit, come into my heart, and in your power draw it to you' (St Catherine of Siena).

'Let nothing disturb thee, let nothing affright thee. All things are passing. God never changes. Patient endurance attains to all things. Who God possesses, in nothing is wanting. Alone God suffices' (St Therese of Ávila)

'There is nothing the devil fears so much, or so much tries to hinder, as prayer' (St Philip Neri).

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT BY CARDINAL MERCIER

O Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, I adore Thee. Enlighten, guide, strengthen, and console me. Tell me what I ought to do, and command me to do it. I promise to be obedient to Thee in all things and to accept all that Thou permits to happen to me. Let me only know Thy will. Amen.

19. SOME CUSTOMS & PRACTICES

IN SUMMARY

The Church's year begins at the start of Advent and the passing of time is sanctified with seasons and feasts. Even each of the twelve months are dedicated to a particular mystery or person.

Once we are in Church, Catholics observe certain practices such as maintaining a prayerful hush, genuflecting, praying before Our Lord in the tabernacle or to the saints, lighting candles, and blessing themselves with holy water.

In addition to the seven Sacraments, Catholics also make use of sacramentals which are objects of devotion or prayers or blessings through which we invoke God's blessings and graces.

The Church's year begins with Advent, on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, and passes through several other seasons including Christmastide, Lent, and Eastertide, as well as a few shorter seasons such as Passiontide which covers the last two weeks of Lent. Each calendar month is dedicated to a particular mystery also, for example, January is dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus and February to the Holy Family. There are many feast days too, for example, Christmas Day, Easter Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday, the three great feast days of the year, along with others which celebrate various mysteries of our Faith (such as Corpus Christi) and saints' days on which we venerate those already in heaven.

Each season and feast day that commemorates one of the mysteries of the Catholic Faith is not just a remembering but a re-entering into that mystery such that the mystery itself is renewed (for example, the Holy Spirit refreshes the life of the Church each year on the feast of Pentecost) and draws us more deeply into a participation of that mystery, such as the Incarnation at Christmas and the Resurrection at Easter.

In addition to the seasons and feast days, there are many other customs and practices that become second nature to Catholics. For example, as we enter a Catholic church (and as we leave) we make the Sign of the Cross with Holy Water as a symbol and reminder of our Baptism.

We genuflect (on the right knee) towards the tabernacle whenever we make our way to our pew in church, or depart from it, or move across in front of it. In the tabernacle we find the Blessed Sacrament, in the form of Sacred Hosts reserved after Mass for our adoration and so that the priest can take Holy Communion to the sick and housebound. Remember, the Blessed Sacrament does not just represent the presence of Christ, it *is* the presence of Christ Himself in sacramental form under the appearance of Bread and Wine.

And even when we pass a Catholic church where we know Our Lord is present in the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, we should make the Sign of the Cross and whisper a prayer such as, *Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.*

It is a pious practice to bow the head slightly whenever we say or hear the Holy Name of Jesus, in prayer or even in conversation. (And even to turn someone else's blasphemous

use of Jesus' name into a prayer by nodding the head and whispering *Blessed be the name of Jesus.*)

We light candles in church in front of statues and images of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints. The gesture of lighting a candle is in itself a prayer, but we should accompany the gesture with a whispered prayer and kneel down for a few moments too.

Catholics make what we call *a visit* to the Blessed Sacrament whenever we can, which means popping into church whenever we have the chance (or if we are passing), genuflecting, then kneeling down where we can see the tabernacle, and whispering an Act of Adoration in honour of the presence of Our Lord whose house we are visiting.

In a Catholic church, men uncover their heads, removing hats and headwear generally, whilst traditionally women cover their heads, for example with a hat or a veil (called a mantilla). This custom is old fashioned but is becoming popular once more. And whilst they are in church Catholics refrain from chatter, focusing their attention on God rather than on their friends, and so help to maintain a prayerful hush in God's house of prayer.

Did you know..? Catholics make use of what are called *sacramentals* which are objects, items of devotion, prayers or gestures, blessed by a priest or otherwise sanctioned by the Church, which help to raise our hearts and minds to God. They do not confer grace as the Sacraments do but the rites and signs associated with the sacramentals may be used to call down special graces and blessings from God. Examples include prayers of invocation or blessings, holy water, statues, medals, candles, and so forth.

In many Catholic churches you will see a sanctuary lamp (either red or white) which shows that Our Lord is present in the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. The only time when He is not present is on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. You may also see people queueing up for the

Sacrament of Confession outside what we call a *confessional*. The confessional is a tiny room where Catholics confess their sins and receive absolution, God's forgiveness. In some churches there is a green or red light by the confessional to show whether the priest is available. There is plenty to see and do in a Catholic church!

From the Scriptures

'In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month' (Apoc 22:2).

From the Fathers of the Church

'All men honour the day of Thy birth. Thou righteous One, keep Thou the glory of Thy birth, for even Herod honoured the day of his birth!' (St Ephrem the Syrian)

'We must not let any season pass without thanksgiving' (St Athanasius).

From the Saints

'Let us, at this season, approach Him with awe and love, in whom resides all perfection and from whom we are allowed to gain it' (St John Henry Newman).

'You are rewarded not according to your work or your time but according to the measure of your love' (St Catherine of Siena).

'It is a bad sign when a man has not a particular feeling of devotion on the chief feasts of the year' (St Philip Neri).

DEVOTIONS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

As the Blessed Sacrament is elevated by the priest at the Consecration in Mass, and again as the Precious Blood is elevated in the chalice, say silently the words of Doubting Thomas,

'My Lord! And my God!'

Upon entering a Catholic Church and genuflecting, especially if the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the altar for adoration, or whenever the priest opens the tabernacle, say,

O Sacrament most holy! O Sacrament divine!

All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine.

20. THE FOUR LAST THINGS

IN SUMMARY

The four last things are: death, judgement, hell, and heaven.

We are exhorted to think on these things, and to pray for a good, or happy, death. To get to heaven we must die in a state of grace.

A good or happy death involves having time to prepare for death by making a good Confession, receiving Extreme Unction, being given the Apostolic Pardon, and receiving the Viaticum.

Failing these things, we should at least make a perfect Act of Contrition.

The Holy Souls in Purgatory cannot aid themselves any longer, so Catholics are bound to pray for them, especially making use of prayers to which Indulgences are attached. An Indulgence is the full or partial remission of punishment still due for sins even after absolution has been given.

We have looked at what God has revealed, what the Catholic Church teaches, what Catholics believe, and how they should live their lives. Now we come to the four last things: death, judgement, hell, and heaven. So that we might live good and upright lives, the saints exhorted everyone to remember the end of their lives and what would come after. When St Philip Neri (1515-1595) was counselling an ambitious young man he asked the youth, What do you plan to do with your life? The young man answered, I shall train to become a lawyer. To which he replied, *Et poi?* ('And then?') Then I shall join a law firm. *Et Poi?* Then I shall become rich! *Et poi?* Then I shall be married and have children. *Et poi?* I shall retire wealthy and comfortable. *Et poi?* Then I shall die. St Philip paused a moment, and added once more, *Et poi?* The young man abandoned his plans and became a priest.

'Death comes for us all,' says St Thomas More in Robert Bolt's play, *A Man for All Seasons*. It is the one inescapable fact of life, even more unavoidable than taxes. In Catholic theology death is, as it were, the cut-off point beyond which we cannot influence our destiny. We shall be judged according to how we have lived here on earth, so we need not only to live well, we need to die well. Whilst other headteachers proudly boasted that they prepared their students for life, the headteacher of one Catholic school replied, We prepare our students for death. He was not being morose, merely practical.

A good death, or a happy death, is one where, first, we die in a state of grace and, second, we have a priest at our bedside administering Confession, Extreme Unction, the Apostolic Pardon, and the Viaticum (the name given to Holy Communion when administered shortly before death). Catholics should make a habit of praying for a good death. In particular, Catholics should pray to St Joseph, the patron saint of the dying. If we cannot get to Confession, or a priest cannot be had, we should make an Act of Contrition, and commend ourselves into the hands of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and utter the words of Our Lord from the Cross, '*Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit*' (Lk 23:46).

After we die, our Guardian Angel will lead us to God to be judged, as Our Lord warned several times in the Gospels. For all the jokes held in the popular imagination about St Peter standing at the gates of heaven, in truth our judgement will be a solemn moment. As none of us know the day nor the hour of our end, we need to be watchful (Mt 24:42; Lk 12: 37-39).

In St John Henry Newman's poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Gerontius sees himself being led from his deathbed. As he draws near to God, he cries out, 'Take me away, that sooner I may rise and go above.' Gerontius recognizes his unworthiness to stand in the presence of God and, in a desire for justice, *wants* to return to the pains of purgatory till he is fit to approach His Creator.

Purgatory is a tremendous gift from God because only the perfect may attain to heaven and how many of us, even on our deathbeds, would claim to have reached a state of perfection? Instead, God affords us this last great act of mercy, that we may be perfected by His grace rather than cast into hell. Yet, because death is the cut-off point, we can no longer influence our destiny and willingly undergo penances after death, so the Holy Souls in Purgatory are dependent on our prayers and penances to help them complete the perfecting process, which will be both painful as we are stripped of the skin of self and joyful as we await the bliss of heaven.

Our Lord warned us many times in the Gospels of the wretchedness of hell where souls will be deprived of the presence of God for all eternity and suffer punishment commensurate to their sins on earth. Indeed, Our Lord spoke more often of this than of almost any other topic. On earth, God is everywhere, so even in our darkest moments none of us have truly experienced a state of complete absence from God, but that is what hell involves. Is hell real? If not, what are we being saved from by Jesus, whose name means Saviour? Yes, it is real. Hell, eternal death, is the final end of those who die in a state of alienation from their Creator and unreconciled to God.

However, heaven will involve us being raised from

the dead (our souls after death and our bodies at the end of time) to come into the presence of the Beatific Vision, seeing God face to face (1 Cor 13:12). We do not know quite what heaven will be like but we do know that '*we shall be like to Him because we shall see Him as He is*' (1 Jn 3:2). '*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end,*' says Our Lord (Apoc 21:6).

Did you know..? Many saints kept a human skull on their desks to remind them that they, too, will die one day. Such a keepsake is called a *memento mori*.

From the Scriptures

'And making a great gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead.) And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins' (2 Machabees 12:43-46).

From the Fathers of the Church

'Then I understood that [my brother] had been removed from the place of punishment' (Martyrdom of Perpetua & Felicity).

From the Saints

'If everyone adopted one Holy Soul to pray for, Purgatory would be emptied in no time' (St Gertrude).

PRAYER FOR THE HOLY SOULS IN PURGATORY (Ps 129)

Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord, Lord hear my voice. O let Thine ear be attentive to the voice on my supplication. If Thou, O Lord, should observe iniquity, Lord who shall endure? But with Thee there is merciful forgiveness, and by reason of Thy law I have waited for Thee, O Lord. My soul has relied upon His word, my soul has hoped in the Lord. From the morning watch even until night let Israel hope in the Lord. Because with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plentiful redemption. Israel indeed He will redeem from all its iniquities.

Ÿ Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord. R̄ And let perpetual light shine upon them.

Ÿ May they rest in peace.

R̄ Amen.

Ÿ O Lord hear my prayer.

R̄ Let my cry come before Thee.

Let us pray: O God, Creator and Redeemer of all the faithful, grant to the souls of Thy servants departed the remission of all their sins, and through our pious supplication may they obtain that pardon which they have always desired. Who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

GLOSSARY

Abstinence A form of penance. Abstaining from (not eating) meat in honour of the fact that Christ died in the flesh. All Fridays are days of abstinence as is Ash Wednesday.

Adoration, also known as Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, is a period of time when the Blessed Sacrament is placed on the altar in a monstrance for our adoration.

Altar A stone construction (sometimes made of wood) resembling a table on which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered.

Altar cloths The white cloths covering the altar, three in number representing the three cloths used to enshroud Christ in the tomb.

Altar stone A square piece of stone (usually marble) into which are embedded the relics of saints (at least one of which must be that of a martyr) which is then, in turn, embedded into the flat top (the *mensa*) of an altar as part of the consecration ceremony. The sacrifice of the Mass is offered on this stone.

Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When the Archangel St Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear a Son who would be called Jesus (*f.d.* 25th March).

Apostolic Pardon A solemn prayer of absolution for the forgiveness of sins and the remission of all punishment due to sins, bestowed by a priest at the bedside of one who is dying.

Ascension When Our Lord was taken up into heaven forty days after His resurrection. (A Holy Day of Obligation).

Ash Wednesday The first day of the season of Lent, a season of fasting, abstinence, and penance.

Assumption The dogma which teaches us that at the end of her natural life on earth the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven. (*f.d.* 15th August, and a Holy Day of Obligation).

Beatific Vision The immediate knowledge of God enjoyed by the souls of the just in heaven.

Benediction A solemn and ceremonial blessing given by Our Lord Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.

Chalice The cup, made of precious metal such as gold or silver, which holds the Precious Blood of Our Lord at Mass.

Corporal A square cloth of linen, unfolded onto the altar, on which are placed the chalice and the paten during Mass.

Corpus Christi Literally, the ‘Body of Christ,’ the feast of Corpus Christi celebrates the giving of Himself by Our Lord to us in the Eucharistic Species. The feast is often accompanied by a Corpus Christi procession.

Crucifix A cross onto which is attached a corpus, that is, a figure of the dying or dead Christ.

Easter Duties Catholics are obliged to go to Confession at least once a year, and to receive Holy Communion at least once a year, between the beginning of Lent and Trinity Sunday (the first Sunday after the feast of Pentecost).

Easter Sunday The day of Our Lord’s resurrection. It always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox.

Ember Days Traditional days of fasting and abstinence which fall on the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday of prescribed weeks, once a quarter. (From a corruption of the Latin words, *quatuor tempora* meaning four seasons).

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. See Adoration (above).

Fast A form of penance whereby Catholics eat significantly less food in the course of a day than they otherwise would. There are currently only two formal days of fasting in the Church’s year, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Genuflection Bending the (right) knee, so that it briefly touches the floor, in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament whenever we cross in front of the tabernacle. (A double genuflection – when both knees touch the floor – is made whenever the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the altar for adoration.)

Good Friday The Friday of Holy Week on which is commemorated the Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion and Death. The most solemn day in the Church’s year.

Holy Day of Obligation A special feast day on which Catholics are obliged to go to Mass even if it falls on a weekday.

Holy Saturday The day after Good Friday, and before Easter Sunday, on which the whole Church watches, waits, and prays in silence following the death of Our Lord and before His resurrection. (Note: Easter Saturday is the Saturday *after* Easter Sunday.)

Holy Week The last week of Lent in which falls Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The most solemn week of the Church’s year.

Immaculate Conception The title given to the Blessed Virgin Mary as well as the dogma which

teaches us that Our Lady was conceived immaculate (without the stain of original sin on her soul) in the womb of her mother, St Anne. (*f.d.* 8th December).

Immaculate Heart A name given to the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary displayed on statues and images symbolizing her perfect purity and innocence.

Indulgence The remission of part or all of the punishment remaining due to sin (even after sins have been absolved in Confession). Indulgences may be gained by undertaking certain prescribed prayers or pious acts.

Lent The main penitential season of the Church's year, lasting for forty days and beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Holy Saturday.

Maundy Thursday The Thursday of Holy Week on which is celebrated the Mass of the Lord's Supper which commemorates the institution of the first Mass and of the Sacred Priesthood. Usually followed by adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at the Altar of Repose which commemorates Christ's Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Missal A book containing all the prayers of all the different Masses that a priest might say.

Monstrance A vessel which holds the Blessed Sacrament in such a way that It can be seen by the people. It is used for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, for Benediction, and for Corpus Christi processions.

Palm Sunday The Sunday before Easter when the Church recalls Christ's triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem riding on an ass. Usually commemorated by the blessing and distribution of palm branches, and a procession.

Passiontide A mini season of the Church's year incorporating the last two weeks of Lent including Holy Week.

Paten A plate, made of precious metals such as gold or silver, on which is placed the large consecration host at Mass which is then consumed by the priest at Holy Communion.

Precepts of the Church Five commands to be observed by all Catholics. They are: *i.* to attend Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; *ii.* to Confess your sins at least once a year, between Ash Wednesday and Trinity Sunday; *iii.* to receive Holy Communion at least once a year, between Ash Wednesday and Trinity Sunday; *iv.* to observe the appointed days of fasting and abstinence; *v.* to provide for the needs of the Church.

Purgatory The place, or state, where Holy Souls suffer punishment after death but also experience joy insofar as they know that, having attained Purgatory, they will, when their purgation or perfecting process

is complete, attain to heaven.

Purificator A white cloth used by the priest, and draped over the chalice at Mass, to purify or cleanse the chalice after the Precious Blood has been consumed.

Rosary A set of beads as well as the accompanying prayers. The Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be are said in a series of decades whilst meditating on certain mysteries of the Catholic Faith.

Sacred Heart The wounded Heart of Jesus displayed on statues or in images, and symbolizing His humanity, His mercy, and His compassion.

Sacred Oils Olive oil consecrated each year by the local bishop at the Chrism Mass on Maundy Thursday: *i.* the oil of catechumens, used for the Sacrament of Baptism to anoint those who are just about to be baptized, *ii.* the oil of the sick, used in the Anointing of the Sick or Extreme Unction, and *iii.* the oil of chrism (to which is added balsam to give it a sweet fragrance) used for baptisms, confirmations, and ordinations.

Sacred Triduum The three ceremonies of *i.* the Mass of the Lord's Supper (on Maundy Thursday), *ii.* the Liturgy of the Passion (on Good Friday), and *iii.* the Easter Vigil (on Holy Saturday). The most solemn ceremonies of the Church's year.

Sanctuary That part of a Catholic church where the altar and the tabernacle are placed, and where the principal ceremonies of the Church's liturgy take place. Usually divided from the nave (where the people sit) by a set of altar rails.

Septuagesima A short season of the Church, lasting two and a half weeks, immediately before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, to help us prepare for the great penitential season of the year. (Observed when the Traditional Latin Mass is said).

Stations of the Cross A series of fourteen penitential meditations on the sufferings of Christ undertaken whilst walking from one Station to the next.

Stoop The small basin which holds holy water at the entrance of a Catholic church.

Tabernacle The place in a Catholic church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved for our adoration and so that Holy Communion may be taken to the sick.

Thurible The censer containing burning charcoal into which is placed grains of incense during solemn ceremonies. The smoke symbolizes both our prayers rising to God and God's blessings being bestowed on who- or whatever is being incensed.

Traditional Latin Mass A form of Mass said according to the missal of Pope St Gregory the Great (d. 604).

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