

Contents

Welcome 1

You probably already know that Confirmation initiates you into the Catholic Church and into the "fullness of the Holy Spirit." The process you are about to begin will help you take the final steps in your Confirmation preparation. It will prepare you to sustain the spirit for the sacrament of Confirmation.

PART 1

The Spiritual Life 3

This is not a book you just open up and read—it's a book that you do. The process will take a few months. It contains self-evaluations, exercises, brief essays, stories, and interviews. It even invites you to do a bit of writing.

PART 2

A Full Member of the Catholic Church 21

The adult you have chosen as your sponsor will be doing the same process as you. Choose a sponsor who is easy to talk to. Your sponsor won't have to come to any meetings, so you are free to choose anyone from any part of the country.

PART 3

After Confirmation 39

There are three parts to this process. After you complete each part, you will be asked to discuss the topics that you can discuss with your sponsor. On three different occasions, you and your sponsor can compare a few notes over the phone, via email, or face to face. When you connect with your sponsor, the two of you are only expected to discuss the specific topics listed. The rest of the material is for your own personal reflection.

The person coordinating your parish Confirmation program will probably schedule a one time gathering and invite you and all the other candidates to attend. This will be a time to further

PART 2

A Full Member of the Catholic Church

As you make your final preparation for full initiation into the Catholic faith through the sacrament of Confirmation, it's important to revisit what it means to call the Catholic Church your spiritual home.

We'll start this section with a story. As you read it, make a list of all the questions being asked. After reading it, jot down your own answers.

The Alien at the Retreat

So this alien shows up at the Confirmation retreat and introduces himself/herself/itself.

"Greetings! I am Alien, sent by my people on planet GOG. Fr. Paul, the one you call 'priest,' said I could question you, but I must depart in twelve minutes exactly."

"That's a crazy good mask you got on!" someone said. "Where'd you get that thing?"

Alien glanced nervously at his/her/its galatical watch. "No time for trivia. I must learn quickly what you Katlicks do in those buildings on Sun-days or Moon-days."

"We're called C A T H O L I C S," someone explained, "and we GO TO M A S S on Sundays and sometimes on Saturdays, but not on Moon-days. We don't have those."

"What do you do at this Mass on the day of the Sun or the Sat?" asked Alien.

"We pray together; we talk to God," someone answered.

"Who is God?"

"God is the Supreme Being," someone explained.

"So the Supreme Being is there in the building at this Mass?"

"Correct," someone replied.

"God is everywhere," said another.

"Everywhere? Even inside your shoes? Even inside the refrigerator over there?"

"Everywhere," someone repeated.

The Alien looked at a young person sitting close to his/her/its webbed feet and asked, "They are teasing me, correct? God is not everywhere. It is not so. Is it? What does God look like?"

"God is invisible," the young person replied.

Alien backed up. "So you talk to someone you cannot see, but you know is everywhere?"

The group nodded.

Alien shook his/her/its one-eyed head. "And what do you Catholics do at this Mass on the day of the Sun or the Sat?"

"We celebrate what Jesus did for us," someone replied.

"Who is Jesus and what did he do for you?"

"Jesus is God's son and he died for us."

"Why did he die for you?"

"So our sins would be forgiven and we could go to heaven."

"What's this thing you call 'sin'? And where is heaven? Why would you want to go there?"

Different members of the group tried to answer Alien's many questions. But it only confused him/her/it more and more. He/she/it was struggling to make sense of it all.

"Let me get this straight. You talk to this God that no one has ever seen, but is everywhere. You say that this Jesus died so that you can go to heaven, which is a place no one has ever gone to visit and come back from. And some of you think it is in the sky somewhere but you are not sure. And you say that this Jesus person died, but then came back, and then left again to be with God. And you celebrate this every day of the Sun or the Sat at the Mass. So, how do you celebrate?"

"We read aloud from the Bible. It's a book that God gave us."

"Fr. Paul gives a talk—we call it a 'homily.'"

"We eat the Body and Blood of Jesus," someone said. "It's a mystery. That's why we go to Mass, to celebrate this mystery."

"Yeah, right, okay. My time is about up. This has been very interesting," said Alien rolling his/her/its eyes toward the ceiling. "Last question, just in case someone on my planet asks: how do you join this Catholic group; what do you have to do?"

"Get baptized," someone called out.

"What's that?"

"Get Fr. Paul to sprinkle water on you," teased another.

"Confess your sins!" someone else replied.

"Read the Bible!" someone added.

"Pray!" another called out.

"Get confirmed with us!" someone said.

"Yeah, we're still getting initiated; stick with us," they smiled.

Fr. Paul returned to the room just as Alien began to leave.

"How'd it go?" he asked. But Alien vaporized before he/she/it could reply.

- How do you think Alien would have answered? What would he/she/it have said? Write your answer here.
What do you think is the point of the story?

What Catholics believe

It's pretty difficult to summarize everything you believe in twelve minutes right off the top of your head! Fortunately, someone has worked on this for you. The Nicene Creed, which dates back to around 450 AD, is the only Christian creed that both Catholics and major Protestant denominations accept. It is the Creed you recite by heart during Mass. Now that you've seen what the kids in the Confirmation class told Alien, here's an exercise for you. Compare the ancient Creed with the words from an anonymous "creed" that reflects the beliefs of our modern culture. Notice how the two creeds differ. One describes all of our Catholic beliefs; the other is very vague and general.

Nicene Creed

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

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before
all ages.

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consub-
stantial with the Father;
through him all things
were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was
incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and
was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the
Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand

Modern Creed

I believe in God,
whose spirit is in everyone
and everything.

I believe in Jesus, who was a
son of God.

He taught us the ways of God,
and they killed him
because of what he taught.

He has an honored place
in heaven again, with God.

of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living
and the dead
and his kingdom will have
no end.

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

I believe in one, holy, catholic
and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the
forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the
resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world
to come. Amen.

I believe in God's spirit,
which is a good force
in the world,
helping everyone get
through life.

I believe in heaven
where I will see God
after life.

- What does the modern "creed" leave out regarding God? Jesus? the Holy Spirit? the Church?
- Name one thing you like best about the Catholic Creed.
- Ever wonder why we stand when reciting the Creed during Mass? (And, by the way, have you memorized the Nicene Creed yet?)

Catholics are unique

If you have ever wondered, "What's the difference between Catholics and Christians of other denominations?" you're not alone. First of all, we do have some beliefs in common. For example, we share our faith in Jesus as the Son of God who saved us from sin and enables us to share eternal life in heaven. But here are nine characteristics that are unique to our Catholic tradition.

1. We are eucharistic

We believe that Eucharist is not simply a symbolic reminder of Jesus' sacrifice. We believe it is the real presence of his body and blood. Most other Christians see the Eucharist as a memorial or reminder of Jesus' sacrifice. We see it as his real presence.

2. We are sacramental

You walk into a Catholic Church and dip your hand into "holy water" and make the Sign of the Cross. Then you genuflect before you go into the pew and kneel down. You may look at the gold tabernacle or the body of Christ on the large crucifix hanging by the altar. If it is Advent, you may notice a wreath with four candles at the front of the church. If it is Easter, you will see a large white Paschal candle near the altar. If you attend a baptism, you will see oil, water, and light. We Catholics have our own sacramental language; Catholicism is filled with imaginative signs and symbols. We deliberately use colors, symbols, and actions that speak to us in ways that don't require words.

3. We are a communion of saints

We believe in asking faith-filled friends—those living on earth and those in heaven—to pray for us. This teaching is called the "communion of saints," and every Sunday at Mass we pray these words in the Creed: "I believe in the communion of saints." Sometimes after Mass you might see someone silently praying

the rosary or praying before a statue of a saint. Maybe one of your aunts or uncles has a small prayer table at home with a picture of a deceased loved one and a candle. That's because we Catholics believe that we are united—as one family of faith—with those who have died and those who are in heaven.

4. We have shared leadership

In your parish you notice altar servers, readers, parish council members, eucharistic ministers, a priest, perhaps a nun, a director of religious education, maybe a religious brother, a youth minister, Catholic schoolteachers, Knights of Columbus members, coaches, and catechists. Catholicism has a clear organizational structure to which everyone can contribute. We believe in shared ministry. So do almost all other Christian denominations, but not always with the same complexity.

5. We are committed to justice for all

Did you know that both Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities serve the poor as much as or more than the American Red Cross? Did you know that our bishops led a national discussion about stopping the nuclear arms race? They did the same thing when our country considered cutting welfare to the poor. And did you know that Catholics are committed to these seven principles of social justice: 1. the life and dignity of the human person; 2. the rights and responsibilities of humans; 3. participation in family and community; 4. preference for the poor and vulnerable; 5. the dignity of work and the rights of workers; 6. the solidarity of the human family; and 7. care for God's creation? A commitment to social justice is a central characteristic of the Catholic faith.

6. We are apostolic

Pope Benedict XVI succeeded Pope John Paul II, who succeeded Pope John Paul I, who succeeded Pope Paul VI, who succeeded Pope John XXIII, and so on. That's because Catholicism is apos-

tolic: we can trace our roots right back to the apostles and those who came after them.

7. We are universal

When you go to Sunday liturgy, no matter where you are, you recognize it as the same Mass as the one in your own parish. That's because Catholicism is universal and accepts people from every place and every walk of life. We have a "wide tent" under which each Catholic can focus on their favorite spiritual practices and still be accepted. You want to attend Mass every day? There's room for you. You want to say the rosary? There's room for you. Want Bible study? Got that here as well. Want to serve the poor? Can do that here, too. This built-in acceptance of diverse spiritual interests, devotions, and practices—united under the essential teachings of our faith—makes us unique.

8. We have a positive view of human nature

We know we are flawed and imperfect, but Catholics also believe that each human being comes into the world with the natural ability to sense God's presence in things like truth, beauty, and love. Many other Christian faiths believe that humans come into this world completely flawed—without the God-given ability to sense the Spirit. We believe that although we are born with original sin, we are made in the image of God.

9. We respect both faith and reason

Catholics honor theologians and scholars like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas who have helped us think further about God's will for us and how the Spirit may be leading us in our present age. Catholicism fully accepts the Bible as God's word *and* welcomes ongoing discussion and new insights as well. That's because Catholics believe that faith and reason are partners.

Other Christian denominations, of course, share some of these nine characteristics. For example, many Christian denom-