

journey of faith

for TEENS



C1, Catechumenate • The Sacraments: An Introduction

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.



Eventually, most of us experience the wonderful feeling of being handed the keys to the family car for the first time. It's only a set of keys, yet we feel on top of the world.

It is, of course, not the car keys that excite us. The keys represent something much greater. In a sense, they are a symbol, an outward sign representing something far more important. The keys we clutch in our hands symbolize:

Reward for our hard work

We had to prepare for and pass our driver's tests. Some of us maintain good grades to keep our insurance rates lower.

Freedom

We now have the ability to go just about anywhere we wish, with our parents' permission, of course!

Power

When behind the wheel, we have control over a very large and potentially dangerous machine.

Our parents' trust

When our parents hand us those car keys, they are in effect telling us, "You have earned our trust and confidence. We believe you will use your best judgment when you are driving this car because your precious life depends on it."

What are the sacraments?

Just as those car keys represent the great privilege of driving a car, **sacraments** are outward signs and actions representing God's love and saving grace. We are physical beings and we learn and understand best through our **senses**—seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. We communicate through the use of our senses.



For example, when you wish to express love for another person, you might use words (which are heard or seen), hugs (which are felt), and flowers (which are seen and smelled). While physical expressions of your love are not the same as your love, your love is communicated through them. So words, gestures, and physical objects become signs of love.

How does Jesus communicate love?

The sacraments are ways through which Jesus communicates his love for us. Jesus realized that human beings need concrete, physical signs in order to comprehend the incredible reality of his love. While on earth with his disciples, he frequently used physical signs to communicate his love.

Look up one or two of these gospel passages and write down the physical sign Jesus used to help his followers understand how much he cared for them:

Matthew 8:1-3

Mark 10:13-16

Luke 9:12-17

John 13:3-5

Jesus is still using physical signs today to communicate his love in the signs and actions we call the sacraments. The sacraments are the saving actions of Christ happening right now for us, his beloved children.

The definition of sacrament familiar to most Catholics is quite specific:

**AN OUTWARD SIGN
INSTITUTED BY CHRIST
TO GIVE GRACE.**



The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (abbreviated CCC) helps us

to understand these words a little better. It tells us that the sacraments are signs instituted by (meaning established by or originating with) Christ by which the life of God is given to us. These visible signs and actions make present the grace of God through the Holy Spirit (see CCC 1131). In other words, the sacraments are not just sign and symbol, they are the means through which God gives us divine life and grace.



The Church celebrates the sacraments as a community of faith (see CCC 1132).

The Holy Spirit prepares us for the sacraments through the Word of God (as expressed through the Bible), and we must receive the sacraments with hearts that are open and loving. Our faith is strengthened through the sacraments if we are well prepared and open to receiving the grace of God (see CCC 1133). On the other hand, if we do nothing to actively prepare for the sacraments and if our minds and hearts are closed, we will not be able to receive God's grace and love, though they are offered to us. Even God cannot give us a gift if we are unwilling to receive it.

The sacraments benefit us as individuals, but they also bring life to the entire Church. As members of Christ's Body, when we are strengthened as individuals, the Family of God is strengthened as a whole (see CCC 1134).

The seven traditional Catholic sacraments are baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, reconciliation, holy orders, marriage, and anointing of the sick. Each of these sacraments is covered in greater detail in separate handouts.

Can we look at sacraments in another way?

Many of today's Church scholars (those who closely study and help us to understand Church teachings) look at sacraments in a larger sense. Any person, event, or thing through which you meet God or experience the presence of God is a kind of sacrament.

For example, the first time you climb a mountain and look down at the world below, you might well feel God's presence and majesty in a way never experienced before. In a sense, the magnificent beauty that you behold becomes "sacrament."



Similarly, when your sadness is lessened by the comfort of a caring friend, that friend is a kind of sacrament. Both the mountains and the friend make God something we can see, hear, touch, and feel. Sacraments make God real for us.

This way of looking at sacraments makes us more aware of God's presence in our everyday lives. We become more aware of the many times we are graced.

Where did the seven official sacraments come from?

The sacraments began with human experience—the human experience of the followers of Jesus. As Jesus' followers grew to know him, they also grew to know God. Jesus himself was sacrament for his disciples.

It was through him and him alone that they came to know God (see John 8:19; 14:6-10).

There was such Good News, they had to share it with the whole world.



In doing that, the early Christians acted just like their Hebrew ancestors. So that the generations to come would not forget, the Hebrews told and retold important stories, always in the same pattern. These stories contained particular words, rich symbols, and important actions. For example, the Hebrew celebration each year of the Passover meal contains the same foods, eaten in the same order, with the same prayers. When particular words and symbolic actions are used over and over again, always in the same pattern, the words and actions are called **rituals**. The first Christians, like the Hebrews before them, developed very significant rituals. Rituals were important to them and were part of their way of life.

Rituals remain an important part of our lives. Describe a regular "ritual" in your household, perhaps relating to how birthdays or holidays are celebrated.

Now let's look at some examples of what the early Christians did. The disciples knew well the story of Jesus' baptism: God proclaimed Jesus "beloved Son," and the Spirit came down upon him.



The thought came to them that if they could also go down into the waters of baptism, wouldn't this action powerfully symbolize what was happening to them? For they, too, were beginning a new life as sons and daughters of God! They, too, were receiving the wonderful gift of the Spirit!

The early Christians also remembered how Jesus often invited everyone to come and eat with him.

Many experts believe that this table fellowship was one of Jesus' most common and most important actions. Jesus loved to sit and share a meal with his friends.

We know the Last Supper became the most important of Jesus' shared meals. Could any of the disciples forget this night? Hardly, especially after Jesus had washed their feet and shared the special meal of bread and wine with them. Then he commanded them to remember these

events and do as he had done. So the ritual of "breaking bread" and sharing it with others became very important to the disciples.

In this and other ways, they continued what Jesus had done. They prayed and laid hands on one another, healed, and forgave, just as they had seen Jesus pray and lay hands on, heal, and forgive. As Jesus had been the sacrament of God for them, they (as the members of his Church) were in turn becoming the sacrament of Jesus for others.

That was then. What does it mean for the Church today?

Today, as members of Christ's Church, we continue the ritual actions of the first Christians. Just as Jesus used his physical body to bring people closer to God, the risen Lord now uses the seven special rituals we call the sacraments to help us feel, see, and know the presence of God. One very important reason why the Church exists (the Church's **mission**) is to make Christ truly present in a way that we can feel and understand.

How do these seven sacraments actually work?

The sacraments, as symbolic actions, actually bring about what they symbolize. For example, the ritual of baptism (in which a person's body is placed in water or water is poured over the person's head) symbolizes the person being cleansed of original sin and being

How come we don't feel GOD all the time?



filled with the life of the Spirit. At the same time, God is actually making that cleansing happen. The sacrament gives us symbols we can sense, while God strengthens us spiritually through grace.

We may not feel any different when receiving a sacrament for many reasons. It is possible we have never had the opportunity of experiencing the sacraments as they were meant to be. Or perhaps our hearts (and eyes and minds) were not open

to the will of God or to the many ways God works in our lives. As we discussed earlier in this lesson, God cannot give us a gift that we are not open to receiving.

We also may not feel God's presence and action in the sacraments because we are expecting magic. There is no magic in the sacraments. Human beings tend to be superstitious, and this can be very harmful when talking about the sacraments.

If we expect God to perform magic through the sacraments, then we are actually trying to manipulate God or tell God what we expect.

That is the opposite of what we want to do. An open heart allows God to act in us and through us in ways that we never even imagined! An open heart does not manipulate

God. There was no magic or superstition in the way the Church's sacraments began. The sacraments grew out of real life experiences. The early disciples wished to spread the Good News that their Lord and Savior was not gone—he was with them each and every moment in his Spirit. The sacraments are Christ's loving gift of himself to his Church.



I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU.

Journal Starters

Describe a person or experience that has given you the opportunity to know God just a little better. Have you known a person who cares for you so much that you have actually felt the care and compassion of God? Have you been to a place so beautiful that you have a clearer understanding of God's creative power and God's love for creation? In the days to come, try to become more aware of God's presence and activity in the world around you.



The Good Words

sacraments

senses

rituals

mission



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C2, Catechumenate • The Sacrament of Baptism

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Passionist Father Donald Senior tells this story about his experience with a tribe of native peoples while on a trip to the Philippine Islands:

One Easter I had a chance to meet with a tribe called the Tubolis who live high up in the mountains of Mindanao.

For the Easter Vigil, the community of the baptized [Christians] gathered on one side of the river, which is not very wide but very swift and extremely cold. It was dusk so they had torches; they also had a lot of blankets and a number of jars of oil. Meanwhile, the **catechumens**, those who were to be baptized, were on the other side of the river. Father Rex, their missionary, had planted himself in the middle of the stream, and the rushing water came to just above his waist. Then the community started beckoning to those on the other bank, calling each by name—“Come on over, Juan; come on over, Maria.”

The catechumens looked at that stream, and they were a bit fearful because of its swiftness and also because they were already cold, even before getting into the icy water. But the shouts of “come on over!” continued and got even louder. So one by one they would plunge into the water with everybody still calling to them. And when they came up the other side after being baptized, the community would grab them with blankets, rub oil on them, and pull them into their midst. The whole thing was a powerful, powerful scene and afterward they had a Eucharist, right there on the banks of the river with the newly baptized.

The word *baptize* comes from a Greek word meaning to plunge or immerse. These words suggest the use of water—a most important symbol in the sacrament of baptism. In the story above, the catechumens quite literally plunged into the cold, dark river, immersing themselves in the water. They then rose from the

water on the opposite bank and were eagerly greeted by the community of believers. Though the Tubolis live half a world away, their experience of the sacrament of baptism is not completely unlike the experience of our catechumens entering the Church on Holy Saturday night.

In both celebrations, the darkness is dispelled or broken by the light of fire—a powerful symbol of Christ’s presence. The baptism itself involves the symbols of water and oil. Both experiences also include the active presence of the community of baptized believers who witness the triumphant moment and then welcome the newly baptized into their midst.

What is the sacrament of baptism?

Jesus called his death and Resurrection a baptism: “There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) tells us more about the sacrament of baptism and helps us to understand Jesus’ words. The **catechumen’s** “plunging” into the waters of baptism symbolizes his or her burial into Christ’s death; as the catechumen rises from the water, he or she is resurrected with Christ, as “a new creature” (see CCC 1214). While not as dramatic, the symbolism remains the same when water is poured over the heads of the catechumens.

The sacrament brings about the action of the Holy Spirit within the

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C3, Catechumenate • The Sacrament of Confirmation

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Imagine for a moment how the disciples of Jesus must have felt in the days following his crucifixion and death. They must have been grief-stricken, because the man who had loved them and led them, washed their feet, shared their meals, and faithfully taught them was now gone. The disciples were confused and unsure of their mission. Saint John says they were so afraid that “the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). How well most of us can relate to each of these

feelings—sadness, heartbreak, confusion, and fear.

But Jesus did not abandon his friends. He promised them he would give them the courage they needed to face any fears about serving him. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). And it was a promise Jesus kept!

Saint Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, vividly describes the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

ACTS 2:1-4

The disciples immediately went out and began to preach the Good News, their fear and sadness forgotten.

The sacrament of confirmation bestows these marvelous gifts of the Holy Spirit upon us. Like Jesus’ first disciples, *we* are given the courage to bring the Good News to our own world. Jesus is still fulfilling his promise of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of confirmation.

The sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist are called the **sacraments of Christian initiation**. Together, these sacraments lay the foundation for every Christian life. We are born anew through our baptism, strengthened in confirmation, and nourished by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*—CCC 1212).



Because of the close connection between baptism and confirmation, the early Christians usually celebrated the two sacraments together in one rite. But the New Testament does lay a foundation for two *different* celebrations. For example, Philip the deacon sent for the apostles Peter and John to come and lay hands on some women and men whom he had baptized “that they might receive

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C4, Catechumenate • The Eucharist

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Your parents have given you permission to host a summer barbecue in your backyard.

On the evening of the barbecue, your best friends are the first to arrive. They help you prepare the grill and refreshments. They eagerly anticipate the arrival of the rest of the guests so the evening of fun can begin. But when the doorbell rings, your friends seem a bit puzzled. You have invited not the good athletes and most popular students at school but the misfits. In walks a young man who once got in trouble for using illegal drugs. With him is another teen whose parents are divorced alcoholics. A young girl, known to hang with the wrong crowd, also steps in. Then come the kids who don't seem to fit in anywhere at school, kids who are shunned and made fun of by the more popular students.

You greet everyone warmly, shaking hands and offering refreshments. You introduce them to your best friends and your parents. Then you gather everyone around a big picnic table and share a wonderful meal together.

How would your best friends and parents react in this situation? What kinds of feelings do you think they would have?

It is somehow part of human nature to want to belong to a group of people whose common interests and values we share. It is, unfortunately, also part of human nature to exclude those we view as different or whose behavior we decide is unacceptable. Sometimes we exclude others only because it makes us feel better about ourselves. We all wish to be in and not out.

This same human behavior was part of Jesus' culture at the time when he lived and preached here on earth. In fact, Scripture scholars now believe they know the real reason behind Jesus' brutal crucifixion and death.



While it is true that Jesus was accused of blasphemy because he claimed to be God's own Son, studies of the Jewish culture of the time tell us that Jesus' words alone would not have been enough to result in his terrible death. There must have been something else, something so offensive to the society in which he lived that it issued a death sentence and then handed a fellow Jew over to the hated Roman authorities.

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C5, Catechumenate • The Sacrament of Penance

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This example of **sin** and its far-reaching effects echoes the creation story of Genesis. At first, Adam and Eve lived in harmony and peace with themselves, each other, creation, and God. Then the serpent—a symbol of selfish desire and temptation—entered the garden and Adam and Eve sinned. In Genesis 3, we see the pain and alienation they experienced after they disobeyed God.



Elizabeth and Allison had been very good friends since the sixth grade. Now in their first year of high school, they shared everything and were always there for each other.

One evening they went to the movies with a group of friends. They told their parents they were going to see a movie with a rating appropriate for their age, which they fully intended to do. But once at the theater, the group attempted to persuade them to see a popular R-rated film. Elizabeth and Allison felt very uncomfortable with the idea of betraying their parents' trust, but eventually the pressure of friends convinced them that this film contained nothing that would disturb them.

As they watched the R-rated movie, both girls knew their parents would not approve of the terrible violence and obscene language contained in the film. They both went home that night dreading the prospect of lying to their parents. They pretended to have fun and enjoy the movie, but in reality, they were both experiencing a lot of inner turmoil.

When the girls talked the next day, they discussed the story they would tell their parents when questioned about the movie. They were irritable with one another. Something special about their friendship seemed to be missing. They both felt disconnected from their parents—and from each other. There was an indescribable feeling of separation and loneliness deep inside each of them.

How could one small bad decision suddenly seem so big?

Alienation from Self

The word **alienation** means a feeling of separation or distance. Genesis 3:7 tells us that after Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced feelings of shame and guilt for the first time. They lost respect for themselves. They were suddenly aware of their nakedness—their imperfections and the selfish side of their beings. Feelings of openness and confidence were replaced with feelings of shame and uneasiness.

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FOR TEENS

C6, Catechumenate • The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.

A STORY OF HOPE

When Diane found out from her pastor, Father Joe, that her parish was going to offer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick during one of its Sunday Masses, she felt a little hopeful for the first time in weeks. Her mother had been battling cancer for over a year and the difficult chemotherapy treatments had done little to halt the progress of the disease.

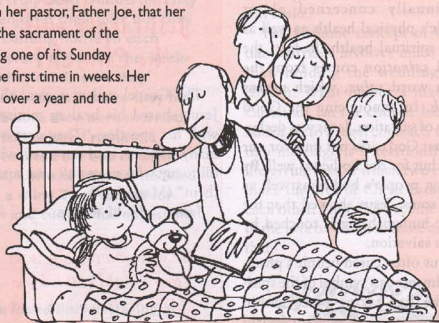
As she watched her mother suffer, Diane went through periods of doubting God's love and even God's existence. Yet, she clung to her faith with the hope that it would somehow see her through these sorrow-filled days.

Diane brought her mother to the Sunday liturgy for the anointing. Her mother, too, was eager to experience the sacrament. But before anointing the dozen or so seriously ill people in the assembly, Father Joe had some important words to say.

The young priest told the assembly that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick was not so much about curing as it was about healing. While curing a person deals with conquering the disease and repairing the body, healing involves breathing life and hope into the person's spirit. While it is important to continually pray for a cure, spiritual healing is far more connected to a person's happiness and inner peace. Healing gives a person power over disease, sickness, and even death.

At first, Diane was disappointed in Father Joe's words. She only wanted her mother cured! But in the weeks following the anointing, Diane began to understand.

She and her mother began to focus less on the disease and more on their relationship. They felt free to share and to pray in ways they never could before. There existed a peacefulness within them both that was never there before even when her mother was healthy. Many times in the months before her mother's death when Diane felt especially close to her mother, she nodded her head and thought to herself, "This could only be the work of the Spirit."



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C7, Catechumenate • The Sacrament of Marriage

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Kim and Michael sat at a corner table in their favorite restaurant reminiscing about the past year. It had truly been wonderful. They both enjoyed their jobs, but they loved coming home to each other every night. On the weekends, they made sure they planned a date, just like they had done before they were married. They still enjoyed romantic

evenings at home, too. As they celebrated the end of their first year of being husband and wife, Kim and Michael decided that they wouldn't want to change a thing. They looked forward to God's great gift of children and to the challenges and joys the years ahead would bring.



Louise found herself staring at her beloved Paul as he sat on the edge of his bed. She found herself wondering, "What has become of the strong, secure man I married 52 years ago?" Several years before, Louise began noticing that Paul often seemed confused and forgetful. He would go to his favorite hardware store and come home with the same items

he had bought last week... and the week before that. Then last year the Alzheimer's disease seemed to strip Paul of what was left of his manhood and his dignity. Yet, when she looked into his eyes, Louise could still see the beautiful person she had married so many years ago, and in that face she also saw the face of God.

Both of these couples are living the sacrament of marriage. Christian marriage is perhaps the most joy-filled and at the same time, challenged-filled **commitment** we can make.

The Catholic concept of Christian marriage involves much more than holding the wedding in a church. What makes a marriage Christian isn't a church blessing added on to a legal contract. Christian marriage is a relationship of life-giving love in which two people make the love of Christ present to each other. They also become a sign of the love of Christ to those around them.



Jesus gave the sacraments to his Church so that he could continue to touch us in our daily lives. In marriage, the relationship of the couple is the ongoing sacrament that reveals God's love for us.

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C8, Catechumenate • The Sacrament of Holy Orders

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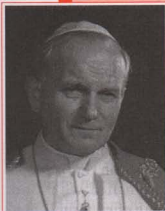


A prisoner had escaped from a World War II concentration camp in Auschwitz. In retaliation, the Nazi commandant chose ten other prisoners to be starved to death. One of the chosen young men sobbed, "My wife, my children!" Father Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward. "I want to die in place of this prisoner," he said. The commandant snapped, "Request granted."

Archbishop Oscar Romero's homilies defending the rights of the poor were broadcast by radio throughout the violence-torn Central American country of El Salvador. On March 23, 1980, people heard Archbishop Romero condemn the cruel actions taken by the military against the country's poor. The next morning, a supporter of the military murdered Archbishop Romero in front of his beloved people as he said Mass.



Tens of thousands of young Americans jammed the Kiel Center in St. Louis, Missouri, in January 1999. But they were not there for a concert or a hockey game. Instead they came to be inspired by Pope John Paul II. As the gentle Pontiff encouraged the enthusiastic young men and women to live faith-filled lives, their voices broke into song, "We are the Light of the World! We are the Light of the World... and we will cry the Gospel, cry the Gospel with our lives!"



Scripture tells us that every baptized Christian is part of the **universal priesthood** of Christ: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). This lesson focuses on what we call the **ordained priesthood**—bishops, priests, and deacons.

Christ, The True Priest

Saint Paul's Letter to the Hebrews emphasizes that Christ the True Priest is compassionate and loves us dearly. He came to us, not in search of power, but as our servant. This came as a great shock to many Jews who were awaiting a messiah who would be a warrior-king—not a humble servant. Of all the roles today's ordained priest must fill, none is more important than the role of service to the people of God.

Did Christ ordain priests?

In the gospels, there was no formal ceremony in which anyone was ordained a priest. In fact, the term *priest* was not used to describe the leaders of the new Church for the first one hundred years after Christ. But there is little doubt that the apostles served the Church as the first priests and bishops. They were closely connected to the work of

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C9, Catechumenate • The People of God

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Your journey toward faith began the moment you became aware of God in your life. Whether a powerful conversion experience or a gradual awakening to God's presence, this awareness marked a starting point, the beginning of your relationship with God.

Not so on God's part. There has never been a time when you were outside of God's awareness. You were fashioned in God's thought and brought to life by God's love. Your love relationship is nothing new to God.

The Hebrew Scriptures tell the story of God's relationship with the people of God—the awakening of their awareness, their flights from or their journeys toward God. In these ancient stories,

you may recognize your own. This should not come as a surprise. To seek God and meaning in your life is as old as humankind.



Beginning with Abraham

(Genesis, chapters 15-21)

Have you ever forgotten about God?

Well, after Adam and Eve, humanity's mind wandered very far from God. After a while, only a few were left who recognized God's presence in their lives.

Among these few was a man called Abram.

One day God asked Abram to

take his wife Sarai and go to a distant land. Leaving everything familiar behind and putting all their faith in God, they were led many miles to the land called Canaan. Here God gave Abram and Sarai new names—Abraham, which means *father of many nations*, and Sarah, which means *princess of the people*.



When God named someone, it meant that this person belonged to God. Then God promised Abraham that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky and the sands of the earth.

Abraham and Sarah prospered in their new land and grew old, but they were childless.

Still they trusted in God's promise of parenthood. When Sarah was very old, she finally gave birth to Isaac, which means "God's laugh."

The faith of Abraham and Sarah, their complete trust in God's plan, and the patience with which they waited out the promise had led at last to their greatest joy, the miracle of Isaac.

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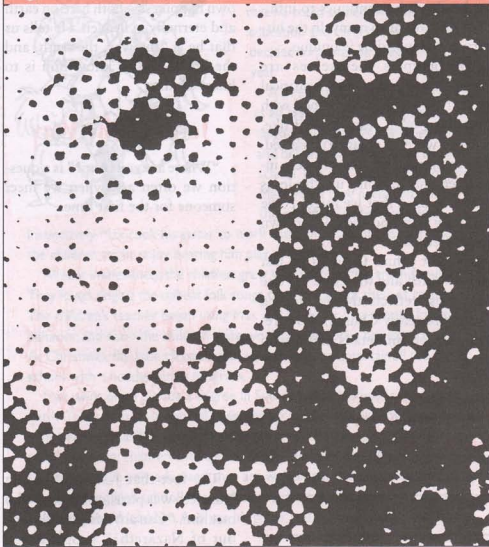


C10, Catechumenate • Who is Jesus Christ?

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Look at the picture [below] while holding the paper six to eight inches from your eyes. The picture looks like nothing more than a random collection of dots. The dots may not seem related.

Now look at the picture again this time from a distance of several feet. Did you see the difference? Viewed from a distance, the picture suddenly loses its abstract quality. The dots merge and take on definite, recognizable forms. The picture is no longer a shapeless jumble. Suddenly it has a meaning. It is a face—the face of Christ.



In many ways the Catholic Church is like this picture. It is made up of doctrines and beliefs, prayers and liturgies, and the vast community of believers just as the picture is made up of different dots. When looked at separately, doctrines, prayers, and individuals give us only a glimpse of the Church.

But when we stand back and look at the big picture, we can see how the Church's doctrines, beliefs, traditions, and worship are all interrelated. Each is related to all the others so that together they make up a complete picture. And the picture they form, like this one, is a picture of Christ.

For it is Jesus Christ alone who gives meaning to our faith. He is its living center. Our faith, then, is not a list of separate abstract truths. Our faith, our Church, rests in the living person of Jesus Christ.

How do we come to know the person Jesus Christ?

Two thousand years ago, there were no newspapers or video cameras to record the words and actions of Jesus. Reports could only be spread by word of mouth. Nonetheless, we might expect that the marvelous deeds recorded later in the gospels would have exploded throughout the known world.

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C11, Catechumenate • The Early Church

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Following his graduation from high school, Max wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. All his friends saw college as a great new beginning. They were excited about pursuing studies in business, engineering, and law. But Max couldn't decide if college was the right choice for him. He couldn't imagine himself enjoying any of the careers chosen by his friends.



Max's one true love was music. He played the guitar—and he played it well. Every minute that he could spare, Max played his instrument, wishing that he could somehow build his education and career around it. Max decided to postpone college for a year.

A friend of Max's offered him a job as an assistant to a teacher who taught young children with learning and behavioral difficulties at an area school. This was not the kind of job Max would have preferred, but he thought it would be worthwhile.

Instinctively, Max took his guitar to work with him, thinking that perhaps the children might enjoy hearing him play.

Almost immediately, the children grew very fond of Max and his music. They loved singing the upbeat folk songs that Max taught them at recess. The children's teacher began using Max and his guitar as a reward for good behavior, and soon the children were working well above her expectations. At Christmas, the little classroom of special children entertained the entire school with a holiday music program.

Max went on to pursue a degree in Special Education with a minor in music. Today he is instrumental in setting up resource programs for children with learning disabilities in Catholic grade schools. In the past, these schools could not serve children with special needs, but because of Max, these children are not only educated, they are welcomed! Back in those confusing days following high school, Max could never have imagined where his new beginning would lead him. And yes, his guitar still goes with him—everywhere.

When faced with his new beginning, Max was feeling confused and terribly unsure of the future. We have all experienced times when the future seemed frightening and uncertain, especially when we were faced with big changes such as a new school, a move to a new city, or changes in our family situations.

Whatever your new beginning, you probably had no idea where you might end up. But still, you had to take that first step. And two thousand years ago, the Church was in the same position. Not one of those early Church members could even begin to imagine the Church of today when they first started out. They were concerned only with questions of who they were and how to survive. If the early Church had stayed the way it was back then, we would still be a small sect of the Jewish faith.

But like Max, the Church moved forward—one step at a time. Like Max, early Church leaders felt uncertain about their future. It took a special courage to face the new beginning.

Did Jesus start
the Church?



journey of faith

for TEENS



C12, Catechumenate • History of the Church

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.

Kathleen found the puppy near the side of the road on a dark, cold night. It lay huddled next to its lifeless companion, another puppy with similar markings who was likely a brother or sister. Kathleen could only guess that the puppies had been abandoned by some cruel owner and that the one pup had been struck by a car. The dead puppy's faithful sibling would not leave its side, despite the fact that it was terrified.

It took many months for Kathleen to earn the puppy's trust after she brought it home that terrible night. She named the pup "Second Chance" because she was hoping she could give him exactly that—a second chance. She called him Chance for short.

Kathleen wished she knew her dog's history, for perhaps that would help her to understand some of his fearful ways. Without knowing the exact details of Chance's history, Kathleen could only assume that his puppyhood had been one of neglect and abuse. She knew that it would take years for Chance to fully trust her. But she vowed to give her dog a second chance at a happy, love-filled life.



Why is history important?

Your life story reflects the fact that who you are today was influenced by what happened in the past. Anyone who really wants to get to know you would need to learn about your history to get a clearer picture of who you are now. Just as Kathleen could not fully understand Chance because she did not know

his history, no one can completely know you without knowledge of the people and events that shaped and influenced your life.

It is the same with the Catholic Church. Knowing about the way Christ has worked in the Church in the past helps us see Christ working in the present. The story of the Church, like your own personal story, is the story of a journey of faith. The Church's journey actually began thousands of years ago with

the Israelite people, had its foundation in Jesus Christ, and has evolved through many periods, some of them extremely difficult.

We discussed the first period in the handout "The Early Church" (C11). This handout continues with the next period in Church history.

What happened after Christianity became acceptable?

Freed from the fear and anxiety of persecution, Christians had the time to think about the truths of God's revelation made through Jesus Christ. Many great thinkers, like Saints Ambrose, Basil, and Gregory Nazianzen, expanded the Church's understanding of God.

Unfortunately, this period in Church history also produced some thinkers whose thoughts wandered far from the course set by Jesus during his earthly ministry.



journey of faith **for Teens**



C13, Catechumenate • Christian Moral Living

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.



Evan was very close to getting his first A in math—a subject that he always found terribly difficult. Two days before his final exam, he saw a copy of the test sitting on his teacher's desk while she was out of the room. Evan felt a strong desire to take a look at a few of the test questions, even though he knew he would be cheating. But if he knew the questions in advance, he would certainly have a much better chance at attaining that A. Evan was torn.

When Carrie joined her friends near the lockers before school, she heard them saying cruel things about a girl who was new to the class. At first, Carrie just listened to their comments, but soon she found herself joining in the conversation. While it made her feel a part of the group, she was also aware that the stories they were circulating about the new girl were not only cruel, they were completely untrue. Carrie began having mixed feelings. It felt good to gossip about another person, but how would this person feel if she ever found out about the lies her classmates were spreading?



We are continually faced with everyday moral decisions. Through our words—and especially through our actions—we develop our moral character. As adolescents and teens, we begin defining who we are by the decisions we make when faced with situations that involve choosing between right and wrong. Jesus tells us how important our actions are:

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

MATTHEW 7:24-27

This passage tells us that we must begin building our moral houses on rock as young people. If we make good choices when faced with small moral decisions, we begin building a good foundation that will keep us on solid ground when we are someday asked to make big moral

journey of faith **for Teens**



C14, Catechumenate • Social Justice

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.



Dorothy Day, an American woman famous for her service to the poor, told this version of an old folk story that illustrates what social justice is all about: "When you see a man walking on the road, and he is run down by a truck, of course you will run to his aid. And if you see the same thing happen to another person, you will respond the same. And you would continue to respond to these scenes. But, after a while, you would start to question where the trucks running people down are coming from. And when you found out, you would try to stop them at their source."

From its beginning, the Church has sought to understand and live out Jesus' command, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). The Church's work toward a world that provides food, shelter, security, fairness, and human rights to each and every human being is a call to social responsibility. Saint Ambrose describes why social responsibility is a necessary part of the mission of God's Church:

God created the universe in such a manner that all in common might derive their food from it, and that the earth should also be a property common to all. Why do you reject one who has the same rights over nature as you? It is not from your own goods that you give to the beggar; it is a portion of his own which you are restoring to him. The earth belongs to all.

Today, a small number of people control much of the world's resources and much of its wealth. At the same time, millions of people do not have adequate food or shelter for themselves or their families. There exists great inequality between the haves and the have nots. The Church believes that the life of every human being is sacred, and no human being should be without basic needs such as food, shelter,

journey of faith

for Teens



C15, Catechumenate • Life: The Greatest Gift

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.

A Story of Life

In the year 1287, a little girl was born into a noble Italian family known for its bravery during wartime. Margaret, as she was called, was one of the most unwanted babies ever born. She had a humpback, one leg shorter than the other, and a large head with an unusual shape. She also was blind.

Her parents told the story that Margaret had not survived birth and banished her from the main rooms of the castle to be tended by a nurse. But, as the years went by, Margaret got around the castle and won the love of many of the servants with her warmth and intelligence. Afraid that her identity might be revealed, her parents walled her into a tiny room in a forest chapel.

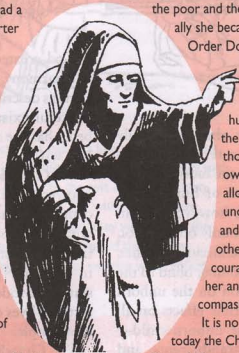
The little child did not lose heart. With the help of the chapel priest, she learned how to make her prison into a place of quiet contemplation.

Margaret's parents then took her to another city known for healing miracles. When a miracle did not occur, they simply abandoned their daughter at the

church. Again, Margaret did not despair. Though she had been denied real love all her life, she began giving her love to the poor of the city. This was the beginning of her remarkable ministry to the poor and the needy. Eventually she became a Third

Order Dominican, all the while continuing her work of feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and visiting those in prison. Her own pain-filled life allowed her to understand the pain and suffering of others. Her faith and courage transformed her anguish into compassion.

It is no wonder that today the Church calls her Blessed Margaret of Castello. She showed a great respect for all life in the way she lived. Margaret was a most beautiful person in God's eyes. Though her parents deemed her unwanted, God had the greatest plans for her! Refusing to give in to self-pity, this exceptional young woman brought the love of God to the poorest of the poor. Indeed she became the heart, the hands, the loving arms of God.



In 1983, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin called U.S. Catholics to adopt what is called a **consistent life ethic**. This means that we must consider all human life sacred. This includes life from the moment of conception until natural death. This includes the unborn, the elderly, the dying, the suffering, the imprisoned, and the mentally ill. We say consistent life ethic because there are no exceptions. Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, every human life is sacred.

If we stand for a consistent life ethic, we must oppose evils that threaten or demean human life. This includes abortion, the building up of nuclear arms, and capital punishment. Cardinal Bernardin said that a consistent life ethic would also include equally strong support for positive social programs that honor and respect life, from feeding the hungry and housing the homeless to helping the elderly and the immigrant.

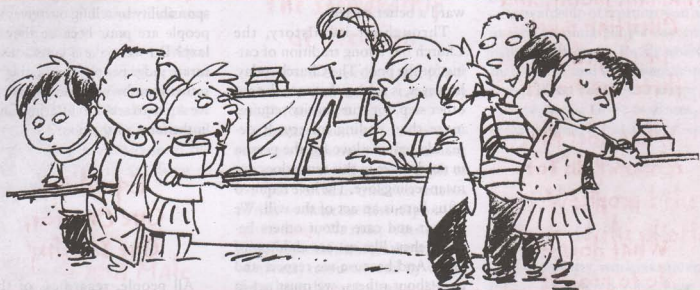
Possessing a truly consistent life ethic is more difficult than it seems. While many of us appreciate and understand the value of most human life, many of us have great difficulty understanding the value of some human life, especially under certain conditions.

For example, how many of us value and respect the life of a man on death row imprisoned for a

journey of faith **for Teens**

C16, Catechumenate • The Dignity of Life

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.



In a recent experiment, half of a junior high class were asked to wear white collars for the day. They were told that they were inferior to the rest of the class, who did not have to wear the collars. The white collars were forced to do the less desirable tasks; they were put to the back of the lunch line; the teacher treated them as less intelligent. Before long, the students wearing white collars

began to actually feel inferior. Even more surprisingly, they did not do as well on their schoolwork! The experiment showed how treating people as inferior made them believe that they really were inferior.

The following day the other half of the class were made to wear the white collars, and they experienced the same feelings of inferiority.

All human beings ought to value every person for his or her uniqueness as a creature of God, called to be a brother and sister of Christ. This explains our efforts to defend human life against every influence or action that threatens or weakens it.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

For Catholics, valuing and respecting each human life must go beyond avoiding the taking of human life. Respecting human life means working to make sure that every person can live with **dignity**. To live with dignity means to live a quality of life that brings the person honor and respect. The teachings of Christ demand that we take a stand against anything in society that denies peoples' rights and dignity.