

Spreading and Defending the Faith

Confirmation Student Textbook

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Introduction

Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? are the standard questions a good journalist uses when writing a news article.

The “lead”, or first sentence of an article, usually answers these questions. The answers capsule the article and give readers essential information about a particular event. The remainder of the article expands upon the information found in the lead and first paragraph.

The standard news article is set up in an inverted pyramid form, in which the most important information is presented first and the least important last. This form enables a copy editor to leave out the last part of an article, if the newspaper does not have enough space for the entire article, and the reader can still obtain the essential information from the abbreviated article.

This textbook on Confirmation has a number of articles about Christ and his Church written in a newspaper format. You will be asked to analyze these articles and answer the essential questions—Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?—so that you can capsule important information about your faith. By asking the journalist’s six questions, you can arrive at essential elements of the faith. The answers you uncover will assist you in understanding better the truths revealed to us by Christ and his Apostles. The better you understand your faith, the better you will be able to live it and explain it to others.





CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY CHURCH

Three Thousand Jews Become Followers of the Late Jesus of Nazareth

JERUSALEM—Three thousand Jews were baptized in Jerusalem yesterday, becoming followers of the late Jesus of Nazareth after a series of unnatural events occurred on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Jesus of Nazareth, who, having been crucified on Golgotha, died about fifty-three days before this feast, has been reported to have risen from the dead.

A group of followers of this former religious leader are led by a man named Peter. This band of followers had been praying in the upper room where Jesus had his last supper before his Death. According to a follower of Jesus, named Luke, these disciples, including the mother of Jesus, had been gathered in prayer in this upper room for the previous nine days.

Bizarre events began to happen on the tenth day, which coincided with the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Luke said that “suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2).

“And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them” (Acts 2:3), Luke continued. “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:3).

According to eyewitnesses, many Jews from outside Israel were in Jerusalem and assembled together as they all heard these followers speak in their own languages. The foreigners were able to understand these followers of Jesus as the disciples proclaimed their God’s marvelous deeds.

Some persons in the crowd thought that the disciples of Jesus had been drinking too much. Peter, the leader of these followers, addressed the assembled and said, “These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15).

Peter continued with a long speech about what had happened to their leader, Jesus, who had died. He told them that Jesus was “a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

Jesus had been crucified and had risen from the dead, according to Peter. “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

After Peter boldly asserted that Jesus was “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), the assembled crowd was deeply moved and asked Peter and the other Apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The crowd was moved because “the title ‘Lord’ indicates divine sovereignty. To confess or invoke Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity. ‘No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor 12:3)” (CCC 455).

Peter answered, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

According to Luke, approximately three thousand persons were baptized after more testimony was presented to the crowd by Peter. (Read the actual Scripture account in Acts 2:1–42.)



To learn more about Pentecost read **YOUCAT 118** and **CCC 731**.

Mother of Jesus of Nazareth Stays with Disciples during Pentecost Event

JERUSALEM—Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, the man who died and who many claim has risen from the dead, was with the followers of Jesus during the recent Pentecost event. She was also with her Son when he was crucified at Golgotha about two months ago.

In an interview, Mary was asked about the extraordinary series of events surrounding Pentecost. She said that her role was to be with her Son's followers, because he had set up a structure for continuing to be present to the world.

Mary viewed her role as praying to her Son, who, she said, continues to live. She had stood beneath the Cross as her Son died, and she helped to lay his body in the tomb.

The mother of Jesus commented on how painful it had been for her to see her only child die such a cruel death, when she knew that he was an innocent man. "I knew I was helpless," she said, "but I also knew that he was doing the will of his Father in heaven. I offered him to his Father as he himself poured out his life to his Father."

She related that she had found great joy in her Son's rising from the dead, but that she missed him very much since he ascended into heaven. "I long for the day when I can be with him and see him face-to-face.

"I know he is very much with me and that I can receive him at the Eucharistic Sacrifice that we celebrate," she continued, "but I still wait for the time when I can see him again."

Mary said that she plans to remain close to the followers of Jesus. One of them, by the name of John, has been said to be the appointed protector of Mary.

"I know that I can aid them in their work of bringing other people to believe in my Son, Jesus," Mary commented. "Their work is a spiritual work, and I can be of service to them by praying to my Son to assist them.

"I love my Son, Jesus, and he loves me," she stated. "If I make a request to him, he is bound to grant it, if it is his heavenly Father's will." (Read the actual Scripture account of Pentecost in Acts 2:1–13.)



To learn more about Mary read **YOUCAT 117**.

CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY CHURCH

*“I offered him to his Father
as he himself poured out
his life to his Father.”*



CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY CHURCH



Peter, John Confirm in Samaria, Rebuke the Magician Simon

SAMARIA—Peter and John, two Apostles of the late Jesus of Nazareth, traveled from Jerusalem to visit some of Jesus’ followers. These disciples had already heard the Word of God preached to them by Philip, and they had been baptized, but they had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands (Confirmation).

Simon, a magician, wanted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from the Apostles. “Give me also this power,” Simon requested, “that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:19). “Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” Peter responded. “Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:20, 22–23). (Remember, “To confess or invoke Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity. ‘No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor 12:3)” (CCC 455), so Peter was encouraging Simon to pray to God, who alone can forgive sin.)

The magician replied, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me” (Acts 8:24). (Read the actual Scripture account in Acts 8:4–25.)

Council Clarifies Teaching on Salvation

JERUSALEM—The first Church Council held in Jerusalem decided yesterday to permit Gentiles (non-Jews) to be received into the body of believers without first being circumcised. The first group of followers of Jesus of Nazareth had been Jews, while some of the recent converts to the new religion have been Gentiles.

After considerable discussion, Peter, the head of the Apostles, spoke at the assembly, saying, “But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as [the Gentiles] will” (Acts 15:11). Much discussion ensued among the Apostles and presbyters after a delegation from Antioch related the conversion of Gentiles to the faith.

Led by Paul and Barnabas, this delegation came to Jerusalem after dissension had arisen in Antioch because a group of followers of Jesus insisted that Gentiles should be circumcised when they became part of this new religion. The delegation came to the Church authorities in Jerusalem to settle the dispute. Followers of Jesus believe that the Holy Spirit guides a council so that the Apostles will correctly interpret the will of Christ.

The same Council further decided that converts from the Gentiles would not have to observe other Jewish practices except to “abstain from [meat that] has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from [meat that] is strangled and from unchastity” (Acts 15:29). The Council sent two representatives, Judas Barsabbas and Silas, to the Church in Antioch to deliver a letter from the Council about the decisions of the assembly. (Read the actual Scripture account in Acts 15:1–35.)

★ To learn more about Church councils read CCC 882–84.

Pope Paul VI Issues New Document to Update Sacrament of Confirmation

ROME, August 16, 1971—Pope Paul VI issued a letter yesterday addressed to the entire Catholic Church on the Sacrament of Confirmation to update the liturgical celebration of that sacrament and to assist the faithful in understanding better the effects that this sacrament has on the lives of Catholics.

The letter, entitled Rite of Confirmation Apostolic Constitution *Divinae consortium naturae*, not only explains the Sacrament of Confirmation, but also shows that sacrament's relationship to the other sacraments of initiation—Baptism and Eucharist. All three sacraments are related, and together they initiate a person into the life of Christ and his Church.

Pope Paul VI explained in the document that the spiritual life has a certain likeness to the natural life. "The sharing in the divine nature which is granted to all people through the grace of Christ has a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life," he wrote.¹

"The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and finally are sustained by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist," the pope continued. The document further explained the effects of each of these three sacraments.

"In Baptism, the newly baptized receive forgiveness of sins, adoption as



sons of God, and the character of Christ, by which they are members of the Church and for the first time become sharers in the priesthood of their Savior," Pope Paul VI stated.

The Sacrament of Confirmation confers a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who gives "special strength". "Moreover, having received the character of this sacrament, they are 'bound more intimately to the Church' and 'they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ'," the pope continued.

Pope Paul VI also explained that the Sacrament of Confirmation should be administered in the following manner. It is to be "conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: 'Accipe Signaculum Doni Spiritus Sancti' [Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit]."



To learn more about what Sacred Scripture says about Confirmation read **YOUCAT 204**.

CHAPTER 2: CONFIRMATION, THE SACRAMENT

Baptism—Related to Confirmation

To understand the Sacrament of Confirmation, it is necessary to understand the Sacrament of Baptism. Exactly what does the Sacrament of Baptism do for the person receiving it? The sacrament, which consists in the pouring of water or the triple immersion in water with the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” has several effects. Baptism first of all cleanses an individual of all sin, both Original Sin and any actual sins that might have been committed. This enables the baptized person to be a friend of the Lord, something that would have been impossible if the person had not been freed from Original Sin or any mortal sin. Through Baptism, we receive sanctifying grace. “The grace of the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God. Uniting us by faith and Baptism to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the Spirit makes us shares in his life” (CCC 2017). For Original Sin deprived Adam and Eve and all their descendants of the participation in God’s life that made them friends with God.

Through Baptism, which forgives sins, you are made a friend of God. Baptism, through the power of the Holy Spirit, unites you to Jesus, who becomes your Brother. You, then, become an adopted child of the Father.

Through this union with Jesus, you take on the character of Christ. At Baptism, we receive an indelible, or permanent, spiritual character or seal. We belong to Christ. Because Christ and his Church are one, you, then, become united with the Church and enter and become a member of the Church.

The baptized person also becomes a sharer in the priesthood of Jesus, who offers himself to his heavenly Father, particularly in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. You, therefore, are given the responsibility of offering praise and worship to the heavenly Father through words and deeds. In fact, the indelible spiritual sign of Baptism consecrates you for Christian worship, especially the Mass.

The baptized person is not only made a priest (not an ordained priest), but also a prophet and a king. For Jesus is priest, prophet, and king. As a prophet, you have the responsibility of bringing the Good News of salvation to others. As a king, you serve, and you have dominion over the created world by reordering all things according to Christ’s will.

Because Baptism has made you an adopted child of the Father, it also has made you an heir to heaven. You now can attain heaven for all eternity, so long as you do not forfeit heaven by dying in the state of mortal sin.

Baptism also gives you the gifts of faith, hope, and charity, which enable the baptized person to know God, to hope in him, and to love him and his other sons and daughters. This first sacrament of initiation also confers the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

Baptism, then, is the first sacrament all Catholics must receive before any of the other sacraments. It is the sacrament that applies to each person the merits of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection, which won salvation for all mankind.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, then, Baptism is given as a means of personal salvation. The individual is redeemed and born into the life of God. This initial life is further strengthened and nourished by the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.

CHAPTER 2: CONFIRMATION, THE SACRAMENT



Effects of the Sacrament of Baptism

1. Takes away all sin (Original and actual), which deprives one of friendship with God
2. Gives sanctifying grace, which establishes a friendship with God
3. Makes us adopted children of God
4. Confers the character of Christ
5. Makes us members of Christ's Church
6. Makes us priests, prophets, and king; sharers in these three offices of Christ
7. Confers the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity
8. Bestows the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
9. Makes us heirs of heaven
10. Applies the merits of Jesus' Death and Resurrection

★ Learn more about the sacraments of Christian initiation by reading *CCC 1275* and the Sacrament of Baptism by reading *CCC 1276–84*.

CHAPTER 2: CONFIRMATION, THE SACRAMENT

Confirmation—What Is It?

The Sacrament of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit in which a baptized person is sealed with the gift of the third person of the Blessed Trinity. Granted, the baptized person has already received the Holy Spirit in Baptism, but this special sealing with the Holy Spirit is given to bind the person even more closely to Christ and his Church.

Baptism is given for personal salvation, but Confirmation is given to thrust an individual outward and send that person on a “mission”. Confirmation is the Pentecost event for a baptized person. Like the disciples who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and went out to proclaim the Good News about Jesus Christ, those who are confirmed are given the Holy Spirit to energize them “to spread and defend the [Catholic] faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ” (Rite of Confirmation Apostolic Constitution).

The gift of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation is given to bind you more closely to Christ and his Church, and the mission of the Church is to bring others to Christ by speech and action. The purpose of Confirmation is to help you fulfill your responsibilities within the mission of the Church. Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, you are given the grace to become an active agent for Christ, and not merely a passive recipient of God’s gifts.

In the Sacrament of Baptism you have been anointed priest, prophet, and king, in order to give worship to God, to proclaim the Good News, and to serve others and reorder creation according to Christ’s will. In Confirmation, these responsibilities are energized by the Holy Spirit, so that you, as a member of the Church, will take on the tasks connected with these offices of Jesus Christ, which have now been delegated by him to the Church.

Confirmation strengthens the gifts of faith, hope, and charity and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which were given for the first time in the Sacrament of Baptism. Now, as these gifts are strengthened, they can be used to spread and defend the faith.

As a defender of the faith, you are made a soldier of Christ—that is, someone willing to withstand attacks against the Catholic faith, even to the point of death. You are a soldier of Christ in a spiritual sense, not in the sense of being willing to face physical battles. But a soldier of Christ might well be asked to suffer persecution for the sake of the Catholic faith, and you will have the spiritual strength to defend the faith when it comes under attack from others.

To show the connection between Confirmation and Pentecost, the normal minister of Confirmation is a bishop, because the bishops are successors of the Apostles, who were present at the first Pentecost. In special situations, the bishop may delegate a priest to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation.

 **To learn more about the Sacrament of Confirmation read YOUCAT 203 and CCC 1315–21.**

CHAPTER 2: CONFIRMATION, THE SACRAMENT

Finding Life's Meaning through the Sacrament of Confirmation



“You will be sent!” “You will have a mission!”

That mission was given to you when you were baptized, but that mission will be strengthened and energized when you receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. For that sacrament will bestow on you a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit to send you into the world “to spread and defend the Catholic faith both by word and deed as true witnesses of Christ”.

Because you are sent by the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith, you will always have a purpose in life. This means that you will have to look for opportunities to bring the Good News of salvation to the people around you.

These opportunities are plentiful, because all people can grow in their understanding and love of Jesus. Every day you will be with people (relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers, and people with whom you work) who need to hear and see that the redemption of the world affects their lives.

We can spread the Good News by talking to others about the faith and also by our example—that is, our good deeds of service to others. If you look for opportunities to spread the Good News, you will find them everywhere.

You do not have to talk about Jesus all the time to give witness to your faith. You can show others that you are a believer by living your faith and by doing acts of service and kindness.

Even someone sick in bed or dying of cancer has the opportunity and the mission to bring others to Christ by word and deed. Of course, one effective way to bring others to the Lord is by prayer, and ill or disabled persons can lovingly offer their pain and suffering to the Father with the sacrificial Death of Jesus on the Cross for sinners, for the missions, for the good of the Church, or for others who need prayers.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, of the Child Jesus, is the patroness of missions in the Church. She was a young nun who died at the age of twenty-four, who never went to the foreign missions herself. She did, however, offer her prayers and actions for those in need, particularly those in the missions, so she was proclaimed a patroness of missions.

Someone who constantly looks for ways to spread the faith will find ways, because opportunities exist all around us. Each morning a baptized and confirmed person has a good reason to get up—the mission to spread the Good News to others!

Pope Benedict XVI Calls a Synod to Confer about Church's Mission to Evangelize



VATICAN CITY, October 7, 2012—Pope Benedict XVI has convened a synod of bishops to confer on the Church's role in evangelization. The pope will meet with approximately 250 bishops and cardinals from throughout the world (less than five percent of the total number) to discuss various issues surrounding the proclamation of the faith to believers and nonbelievers.

The pope usually convenes a synod every two to three years to receive advice and counsel from his brother bishops about various problems in the Church and goals that need to be accomplished. A synod is different from an ecumenical council, which gathers all of the bishops of the world together with the pope, who is head of the college of bishops. In the two thousand year history of the Catholic Church there have been only twenty-one ecumenical councils. Whereas synods are advisory, ecumenical councils may

teach authoritatively and even can use their authority to declare some teaching of the Church infallible—that is, without possibility of error.

This synod is focusing on evangelizing, which means proclaiming the Good News so that people can come to believe in Jesus Christ and his teachings. One of the problems to be addressed is the reevangelization of Catholic countries where many believers have lost their faith and there is a need to bring them back to the Catholic Church.



To learn more about the mission of the Church read **YOUCAT 11 and 123.**

Father John Maronic, O.M.I., Founds Victim Missionary Group for Sick and Disabled Persons

BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS, 1964—Father John Maronic, O.M.I., founded a group to help chronically ill and disabled people see their suffering in the light of the Gospel. This group, called the Victim Missionaries, has as its goal assisting its members to unite their sufferings with the sacrifice of Jesus' Death on the Cross.

Father Maronic, who has been working at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, gathered a group of handicapped and sick persons together in order to support one another in a Christian understanding of their suffering. Because the sick and disabled were traveling to Marian shrines throughout the world, Father Maronic decided to organize them as they came to the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows.

A member of the religious order called the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, Father Maronic called this new organization "Victim Missionaries" because he wanted the sick and disabled to understand that they could offer their sufferings to their heavenly Father in imitation of Jesus, an innocent victim, who gave his life for all sinners. He used the word "missionaries" because he hoped that the members of this group would see themselves as missionaries sent



to help the Church by offering their prayers and sufferings for the good of the Church.

Father Maronic saw the sick and the disabled as a real "gold mine", ready to be tapped for the good of the Church. "This suffering will be wasted if we do not help these people see that their lives can bear spiritual fruit for the rest of the Church," he said.

Members of the Victim Missionaries gather together once a month for a day of recollection, in which they have conferences on the spiritual life, pray together, and celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.



To learn more about suffering and human dignity read **YOUCAT 66 and 280.**

CHAPTER 2: CONFIRMATION, THE SACRAMENT

Confirmation Is Linked to the Sacrament of the Eucharist

Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist are related to one another, and together they are called the sacraments of initiation, because they initiate and draw those who receive them more deeply into the life of Christ and his Church.

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament that perfectly expresses our relationship with Christ and his Church. When we receive this great sacrament, we are united with Jesus himself as he is risen from the dead. “Christ’s work in the liturgy is sacramental: because his mystery of salvation is made present there by the power of his Holy Spirit” (CCC 1111). When we receive the Eucharist, we receive the Risen Lord.

When we receive the Eucharist, we are also united with the rest of the Church, for, in the Eucharist, members of the Church become one in the Lord, just as grains of wheat come together to form one bread. The Eucharist perfectly expresses the Church coming together and being united to Jesus.

We were created to know and love the Lord. Baptism and Confirmation help us to know and love the Lord. In the Eucharist we have the perfect opportunity to know Jesus and to give ourselves totally to Jesus, who in union with the Holy Spirit presents us to the Father.

Those who have been baptized and confirmed are sent as priests, prophets, and kings to serve Jesus and his Church. As missionaries and ambassadors of Jesus and his Church, they are to draw all people together in faith, hope, and charity, so that they will be able to give praise and honor to the Father.



To learn more about what happens when the Eucharist is celebrated read YOUCAT 217.

CHAPTER 2: CONFIRMATION, THE SACRAMENT

We can offer our studies to the Lord as a prayer of praise to our heavenly Father.



CHAPTER 3: THE MYSTICAL BODY—CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

By our Baptism, we became united to Jesus Christ, and we were united to the other members of his Church. Christ and all the members of the Church form one Mystical Body. Jesus and the Church together, head and members, form the one Mystical Body of Christ. “Christ and his Church thus together make up the ‘whole Christ’ (*Christus totus*). The Church is one with Christ” (CCC 795).

That means that you have a role to perform in the Church. The Church has many members, and we all have a role to play in her activity.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux asked the Lord in prayer what her role in the Church was supposed to be. He answered her by enlightening her mind as she reflected on the Scriptures about the Church being the Body of Christ. “The word ‘Church’ means ‘convocation.’ It designates the assembly of those whom God’s Word ‘convokes,’ i.e., gathers together to form the People of God, and who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ” (CCC 777).

She came to realize that her function was to be the heart because the heart was connected with love. Saint Thérèse wrote, “If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn’t lack the noblest of all; *it must have a Heart, and a Heart BURNING WITH LOVE*. And I realized that *this love alone* was the true motive force which enabled the other members of the Church to act; if it ceased to function, the Apostles would forget to preach the gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood” (CCC 826, emphasis in original).¹

All of us need to figure out what role we play in the Church. Just as each person in a family must cooperate with the other members of the family, so too, as members of the Church, we cooperate with Christ and others in the Church.

 **To learn more about the unity of Christ and the Church read CCC 813, 789, 795.**

At this point in our lives we are called to be students, so it is important to study well in preparation for adult roles in the Church. The more prepared we become through our studies, the better we will be able to serve the Church in the future.



CHAPTER 3: THE MYSTICAL BODY—CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



We can offer our studies to the Lord as a prayer of praise to our heavenly Father and as a prayer of petition for sinners, missionaries, or others who need our prayers. Our desk can become an altar on which we offer our sacrifices to the Lord. These sacrifices can, then, be presented to the Lord every time we participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

But our lives have more aspects to them than study. We are sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends, or neighbors. We participate in sports, play musical instruments, or have hobbies. We read books, watch television, and go to movies.

All these relationships and activities involve our virtues and talents. We are better children of our parents if we have the virtues of charity, respect, obedience, patience, and generosity. We are better friends if we are patient, understanding, and forgiving.

Some of us have athletic talent, while others have the ability to play musical instruments or to sing. Maybe some of us are good with computers, while others are good at cooking.

All these virtues and talents can be put at the service of the Lord and his Church, if we offer them to the Lord. Some can be directly put at the service of the Lord, for instance, by making a cake for a bake sale at church or by singing in a church choir. We should look for ways in which we can help our parish and our Catholic institutions, because they help to build up the Mystical Body of Christ through the sacramental, educational, or service functions that they provide.

But it is not only in church-related activities that we can use our talents for building up the Mystical Body of Christ. We can offer a basketball or baseball game to the Lord as a prayer of worship and petition for sinners to come back to the Church or for some other need. We can start off the game with a prayer in our hearts like the following: “Jesus, thank you for the ability to play basketball. Help me to play well. I give this game (or practice session) to you as a gift of my love, and I offer it as a prayer for sinners who need my prayers.”

CHAPTER 3: THE MYSTICAL BODY—CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The Morning Offering is another way of presenting our virtues and talents to the Lord, for in that prayer we offer “our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings” of each day to the Lord for special intentions of the Church. “God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer” (*CCC* 2567). Even though we say this prayer at the beginning of each day, we can pause throughout the day and offer what we are doing to the Lord. It is a way of lovingly recognizing that our virtues and talents come from him and should be returned to him.

The celebration of Mass, however, is the best way of offering our lives to the Lord. For in the Mass we have the sacrifice of Jesus’ Death on the Cross made present. We have the opportunity to offer all our virtues and talents to the Father with Jesus, as he offers himself to the Father in the same sacrifice he offered on the Cross.

We were not present for the Paschal Mystery, Jesus’ dying on the Cross and rising from the dead, the most important and central event of all history. But God in his wisdom has made this event present to us every time Mass is celebrated. So, each time we go to Mass, it is as if we are standing beneath the Cross with Mary, offering Jesus to the Father and offering our own sacrifices, prayers, virtues, and talents to the Father through Jesus’ sacrifice.

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What Virtues and Talents Has God Given Me?

The Lord has given each person a variety of virtues and talents to serve him. When each of us uses these gifts from the Lord, and we work together as one family, his Church, then Jesus' heavenly Father is glorified.

To use these gifts well, it is important that we know what these virtues and talents are. Make a list of your talents, write ways in which they can be used in the Church, and be sure to thank God regularly for his gift of these talents.

When listing these virtues and talents, make sure to remember the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which were given to you in Baptism and which will be strengthened and deepened by the Sacrament of Confirmation. In addition, remember to list the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, also given in Baptism and strengthened and deepened in Confirmation.

Virtue or Talent

How It Can Be Used to Serve ...

	God	The Church	Others
Faith	Praise of God	Praying for those in purgatory or for vocations	Praying for peace
Hope	Having confidence that God gives grace when we do good for others	Encouraging others in the Church to trust when they are suffering	Helping others see that God will help them in their difficulties
Charity	Celebrating the Eucharist, where we become one with Christ and the Church	Helping at a parish	Shoveling snow or running errands for an elderly person
Mathematics	Offering classes or homework to God as an act of love	Offering classes or homework as a prayer for the missionaries	Tutoring someone who is having trouble in math in class
Singing	Joining the parish choir	Christmas caroling with friends or family	Being in a school musical
Athletics	Offering games or practice to God as an act of thanksgiving	Being an example of good sportsmanship and good conduct	Playing fair and recognizing the talents of others
Writing	Composing a prayer to God	Writing a thank-you letter to a pastor or bishop	Writing a note to tell your parents you love them
Cooking	Offering the act of cooking to God as an act of thanksgiving	Making cakes or cookies for a bake sale for charity	Cooking a meal or a dessert for your family



To learn more about virtues read **YOUCAT 299** and **CCC 1803**.

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The Parable of the Talents

Read Matthew 25:14–30. In this Scripture passage, we see three servants being given certain amounts of money (a talent, at the time of Jesus, was a measurement of money). Two of the servants use the money well, but one buries the talent. The master who gave these servants the money is pleased with the two who doubled his money but is upset with the one who buried the money.

In applying this passage to our lives, we ask ourselves if our Master, the Lord, has given us, his servants, some talents—not necessarily money, but virtues, such as faith, courage, and patience, and talents, such as a good mind, musical ability, or athletic skills. Our talents have been given to us to use well. In reflecting on this passage, ask yourself these questions:

- Have you ever been afraid to use your talents? Fear can paralyze you when you would like to do good things.

- What are some things that cause you to be afraid?
 - Ridicule? Friends making fun of you?
 - Making a mistake? Doing the wrong thing?
 - Losing time or money and not receiving back what you have given up?
 - Being embarrassed? Thinking someone won't like you?
 - Being put out of the group? Being called names?

In thinking about how we are to use the talents God has given us, we may recall times when others have made fun of us. This can be painful, but many times persons who do great things for society must bear the brunt of a few people poking fun at them. Just think of all the cartoons in the newspapers making fun of the president of the United States. The president knows that some of his decisions may be unpopular. But if he didn't act because of the possibility that others would poke fun at him, the whole country might suffer.

If we are afraid that others will make fun of us when we make a speech in public or play the piano for elderly residents in a nursing home, then the people who could benefit from our good works may never receive the fruits of our labors. If we are afraid of being ridiculed for doing what is right—going to church on Sunday or staying sober when our friends get drunk—then others will not reap the reward of our prayer or friendship.

Some of us are just afraid of making mistakes, because we are perfectionists. We have to do things the very best we can or not do them at all. When there is a possibility of making a mistake, we become paralyzed and do not act. We won't sing in public, make a speech, or write a poem, because what we do may not be perfect. Others never benefit, then, from our good works.

We may think that serving others or giving of our talents and virtues demands too much time and energy on our part. We may be afraid that we will lose some of the free time we have for ourselves. What we forget, however, is that we have been made by God to be happy, and the way we attain happiness is to give ourselves entirely to what is truthful, good, and beautiful. Because God is pure truth, goodness, and beauty, we will not ultimately be unhappy or lose out when we serve him or others because we love him.

As the bishops of Vatican Council II wrote, “Man . . . cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”² Our talents are given to us by God so that we can use them to give ourselves in love to God and to our neighbor.

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“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.’”

(Matthew 16:24–28)

CHAPTER 3: THE MYSTICAL BODY—CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Leader of New Religious Group Explains the Social Dynamic of Christians

In his letter to believers in the city of Corinth, the Apostle Paul refers to Christians as the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27). The *Catechism* also proclaims that “the comparison of the Church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and his Church. Not only is she gathered *around him*; she is united *in him*, in his body” (CCC 789; emphasis in original).

Stressing the intimacy of the union between Christ and the Church, remember that the *Catechism* also states: “Christ and his Church thus together make up the ‘whole Christ’ (*Christus totus*). The Church is one with Christ” (CCC 795). And that “Christ ‘is the head of the body, the Church’ (Col 1:18). He is the principle of creation and redemption” (CCC 792). Also, speaking of the Church and Christ, Saint Thomas Aquinas stresses this oneness when he writes: “Head [Jesus] and members form as it were one and the same mystical person” (CCC 795).³ This teaching affects the way Christians treat one another and the manner in which they use their gifts and talents.

Paul also wrote that “the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body” (1 Corinthians 12:14–15).

Paul further explained that “God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be?” (1 Corinthians 12:18–19).

The importance of each person in the Church was pointed out in Paul’s same letter when he said, “But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:24–25).

Paul explained that believers are joined together because “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Because of this union in the Lord, we are also united to one another.

According to Paul, God has set up a priority of functions based on the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to the members of the Church. Apostles are first, followed by prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, assistants, administrators, and those who speak in tongues (see 1 Corinthians 12:28).

In his same letter, Paul wrote that there are three great gifts from God: faith, hope, and love; “but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13)—namely, love of God and neighbor. This is a gift given to all the baptized believers, and it endures beyond death, when many of the other gifts given to the Church cease.



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How Do You Discern Your Vocation?

“Vocation” means a “call”. To hear a call, one must listen. In order to hear what Jesus is asking you to do, you must listen. Jesus may be calling you in a variety of ways, so how should you listen to Jesus?

1. Pray.

Our prayers should include quiet time to listen to Jesus speak. We can do that by thinking about the Scriptures or other prayers we say. As we think about them and try to apply them to our lives, the Holy Spirit may inspire us through certain thoughts that strike our minds. Jesus sometimes uses these thoughts to speak to us. We should pray the following words: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening” and “Lord, show me what you want me to do, for I come to do your will.”



2. Listen to the Church.

Learn and know what the Church teaches, because Jesus speaks to us today through the Church. “The Church is apostolic. She is built on a lasting foundation: ‘the twelve apostles of the Lamb’ (Rev 21:14). She is indestructible (cf. Mt 16:18). She is upheld infallibly in the truth: Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops” (CCC 869). We know that the pope and the bishops are the official teachers who speak in the name of Jesus, so we should always match thoughts from our prayer with what the Church teaches. Sometimes our thoughts in prayer could be our own selfish desires, rather than Jesus teaching us, but if our thoughts go contrary to the Church’s teaching, we will know they are not Jesus’ words.

3. Talk to your pastors, parents, and teachers.

Ask these people who practice their faith how they think you can best serve the Church with your specific talents. They can give you some indication as to whether you have the ability to pursue a certain vocation. If you want to be a priest or religious, your pastor, parents, or teachers can discuss with you whether you have the faith, mental ability, and physical health necessary. You should have the advice of several persons (parents, priests, and teachers), because each one sees you in different ways.

Of all of the people in your life, your parents have had a primary place in your education. The Church teaches that parents are the primary teachers of their children in matters of the faith (see CCC 2223). The Church also teaches that your parents are not to *choose* a vocation for you, but they have a responsibility to give you advice (see CCC 2230). Once you have chosen your vocation, your parents should give you their support and respect.

★ To learn more about vocations read **YOUCAT 265**.

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Special Callings within the Church

Jesus calls us to do special tasks within the Church. Just as a human body has certain parts that can function only in a certain manner, so too within the Church all have different roles to play. Each person's responsibilities are important. The members of the Church meet their responsibilities by following the call of Christ.

You should not seek a role in the Church because of its power or prestige, but because Christ is calling you to this task or role. By following Christ's call, you are led to holiness. The Church has had popes who are saints, and it has had young people whose roles were relatively insignificant also become saints. When you are faithful to Christ's calling, you can help others to become holy also.



■ Within the Church, some are called to the religious life, in which men or women take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Poverty, chastity, and obedience are called the evangelical counsels. Men and women religious take these vows to dedicate themselves more fully to Christ and to express their total love for him.

■ Some men are called to be ordained. This vocation enables the Church to have the Gospel preached and the sacraments celebrated, particularly the Eucharist. Men who are called to be ordained participate in a special way in the mission of Jesus Christ. Bishops participate in the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders; priests and deacons also share in the mission of Christ through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Both bishops and priests are required to make a promise of celibacy, and deacons may make a promise of celibacy or they may be married, provided they are married before they are ordained. If a deacon's wife dies, he may not marry again.

■ Some men and women are called to the Sacrament of Matrimony. This vocation enables a man and a woman by their marriage to become a sign of Christ's love for his Church. Together their enduring marital love represents the total union of Christ and his Church. God gives a husband and wife the grace to have a love for one another that is permanent, faithful, and open to new life.

■ Some men and women remain single throughout their lives. They are called to be holy by their Baptism. When these people respond to the universal call to holiness received in Baptism, they may have more availability to serve people. They may also have more time for prayer than someone who has a family or is in full-time ministry. They can live a Christian life by being a good example for others. Like every baptized Christian, they are called by God to holiness.