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THE
Catholic
Faith
Handbook
FOR YOUTH

THIRD EDITION



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Pray It! Study It! Live It!® resources offer a holistic approach to learning, living, and passing on the Catholic faith.

THE Catholic Faith Handbook FOR YOUTH

THIRD EDITION

Brian Singer-Towns
with
Janet Claussen
Clare vanBrandwijk
and other contributors



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Introduction

“My Dear Young Friends”

Pope Benedict XVI begins many of his talks to youth with these words. It is also a fitting welcome to this handbook about Catholic beliefs and practices. It may seem presumptuous to address you as a friend when we haven’t personally met. But it is symbolic of a truth of our Christian faith, the belief that we are all one family. Every member of the human race is a member of that family, united by the one God who created us all, which is why we should be able to call one another friends, despite differences in nationality or religious beliefs.

Within the human family is another large family, the family of those who are members of the Catholic Church. This handbook is a guide to that family, an overview of the important truths revealed by God, safeguarded and taught by the Pope and bishops of the Catholic Church. You may be a member of that family, and as a baptized Catholic, you are using this handbook as a textbook or reference book in a religion class. Or you may be using this handbook as part of a program preparing you to become a member of the Catholic family. Or perhaps you are reading this handbook simply because you are curious about what Catholics believe and do.

This handbook has been created for all these purposes. Its uniqueness is that it was created especially for teens and young adults. It is not a child's book. You will not find any cartoon characters or cute talking vegetables—which have their place but not here! We have created it to respect your curiosity and provide you with honest, to-the-point answers. Every word and image has been carefully chosen to show you something about Catholic beliefs, art, culture, and history.

We who created this handbook care deeply about young people, and about the Catholic Church, so we dare to call you our dear young friends. We hope and pray you enjoy using this handbook as much as we enjoyed creating it.



Pope Benedict XVI
blesses people
at Saint Peter's
square.

Study! It.

You may have heard of a book called the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (referred to from here on as the *Catechism* or *CCC*). Perhaps you have seen a copy at home or at school. It is a book of the most important teachings of the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II approved the *Catechism*. Bishops, priests, youth ministers, teachers, and other adult Catholics use it as a reference book for authentic Catholic teaching. In its content and structure, this handbook reflects the *Catechism*.

For example, the *Catechism* is divided into four major sections. Each section reflects an important aspect of Catholic teaching. This book follows the same structure. After some introductory chapters, you will find the following sections:

- **Part A** This section is an overview of what Catholics believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. It is based on the Apostles' Creed.
- **Part B** This section is an overview of how Catholics worship God and encounter Jesus Christ through the Seven Sacraments of the Church.

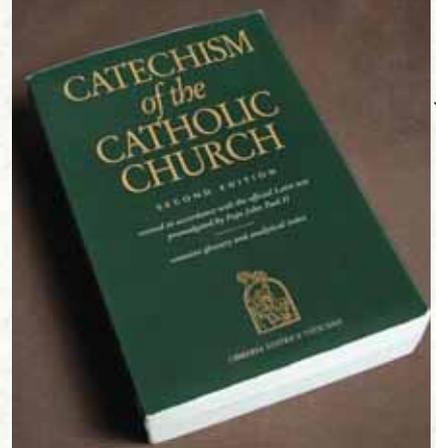
- **Part C** This section is about moral decision-making, sin, and conscience. The Ten Commandments are used as the basis for exploring and understanding specific moral issues and how we are called to respond.
- **Part D** This section is about prayer. It talks about types of prayer, ways of praying, and what we pray for when we pray the Lord's Prayer.

In a way this book is like a study guide or *Catechism* for teens. It contains the essential teachings of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* but is presented using language and examples that will be easier for you to understand.

Each chapter is focused on one topic. At the beginning of the chapter you will find Words to Look For and FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) features to guide your reading. Each chapter also contains additional short articles to help you further study and live these teachings. Here are short explanations of the six types of additional articles you will find.

Did You Know?

The chapters do not explain everything there is to know about the Catholic faith. They cover the essentials, the basics. The Did You Know? articles give additional information that a well-informed Catholic should be aware of. They provide you with the answers to questions like “Why are the priest’s vestments (special clothing worn during Mass) different colors at different times of the year?” or “How many Catholics are there in the world?” If you familiarize yourself with the Did You Know? articles, you can amaze your family and friends with your knowledge of Catholic facts!



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The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the authoritative source for Catholic beliefs. *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* reflects its content and structure.

Live It!

The Live It! articles contain ideas and advice for putting your faith into action. A faith that isn't lived out isn't true faith.

The Letter of James says:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (2:14–17)

In the Live It! articles, you will find advice on setting up a prayer time, suggestions for keeping control of your tongue, ideas on how to respond when someone questions your faith, and a description of how to go to confession. You will find that the Live It! articles contain lots of solid, practical advice.

Catholic Wisdom

The Catholic Church has a long and rich history, and most of us are familiar with only a little piece of it. The Catholic Wisdom articles present the teaching of saints and Church leaders, describe historical events, and explain why certain Church councils were called. Through the Catholic Wisdom articles, you will gain a better appreciation of the wisdom of two thousand years of Church history.

Saintly Profiles

The Catholic Church has an important tradition of honoring women and men whose holy life is an inspiration to others. These are the official saints of the Catholic Church, and there are hundreds of them. The Saintly Profile articles give you short biographies of thirty-nine of these saints. These saints

were chosen to represent the wide variety of people who have become official saints in the Catholic Church. Most of them are famous names you will hear if you hang around involved Catholics for very long. We hope their stories will inspire you to learn more about these great people and to explore your own call to holiness. The date of each saint's feast day is also given, which is the day the Church designates for remembering and celebrating the saint's life.

Pray It

Prayer is a rich part of the Catholic Tradition. As a young person, you may not yet have experienced all the ways in which Catholics pray. These articles will expose you to lots of different ways to expand your prayer life. They will teach you the Jesus prayer, how to create your own blessing prayer, and how to say traditional prayers like the Rosary. Many of the articles explain different aspects of the liturgy, the public worship of the Church. They include quotes from the prayers used in the Mass and the Sacraments so you can reflect on the meaning of these prayers more deeply.

Scripture Connection

God reveals himself and his divine plan for our salvation fully and completely through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. These two ways of communicating Divine Revelation are closely related. So even though this book is primarily devoted to helping you understand Sacred Tradition, you will see frequent Scripture quotations and Scripture references in the chapters. The Scripture Connection articles suggest a particular Scripture passage for you to read that is closely related to the topic of the chapter. The articles also offer questions and commentary to help you understand and reflect on these Scripture passages.

Keep in mind that this book is not intended to be a Bible study resource. For that we suggest you find a study Bible like *The Catholic Youth Bible*®, also published by Saint Mary's Press. That Bible together with this handbook are in a sense a matched set—*THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE* helping you understand Scripture, and this book helping you understand Tradition.

Catholic Quick Facts

In addition to the material in the chapters, you will find a treasury of easy-to-access information at the end of the book. We call this information Catholic Quick Facts, and in it you will find the following sections:

- lists of Catholic beliefs and practices
- a collection of traditional Catholic prayers and devotions
- an illustrated guide to Catholic signs and symbols
- a list of patron saints and their causes
- a glossary of Catholic terms and their definitions
- a time line with important dates and events from the history of the Catholic Church

Turn to Catholic Quick Facts when you want to find a prayer for a special need, find a list with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, or look up the meaning of a word you are not familiar with. You may find it interesting just to browse through these lists from time to time.

How to Use This Handbook

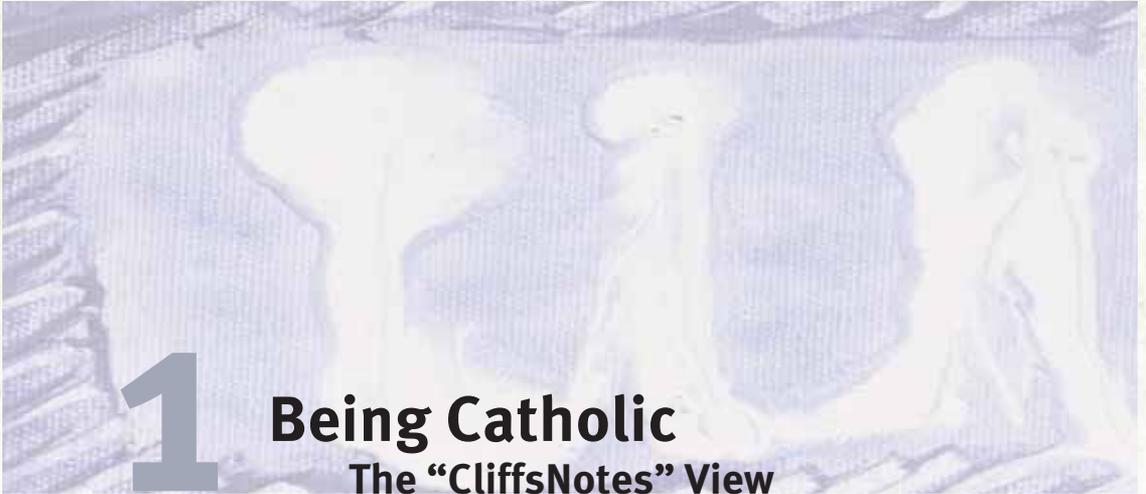
You can make use of this handbook in many ways. You may be using it as a textbook for your parish religious education program or Confirmation preparation program. But this handbook isn't meant to be used just as a textbook. It's a guide you can use in many different ways.

For example, you and your Confirmation sponsor or mentor could read it together. Use the reflection questions throughout each chapter to discuss how you feel about what you have learned and read. A parent might be interested in doing this with you to brush up on his or her Catholic faith.

Maybe you want to use this book just for private reading and go through it in your own time. The chapters are short, so it won't take you long to read through one. If you do read the handbook this way, we suggest that you keep a Bible close at hand. The handbook contains many references to Bible stories and passages that you will want to look up.

Or maybe you just want to keep this book handy as a reference when you have a question about the Catholic faith. The index in the back will help you quickly find a specific teaching or topic. The handbook was designed to make it quick and easy for you to find the information you need. Take it with you on retreats and conferences so that if questions come up, you have a resource handy with answers you can trust.

The people at Saint Mary's Press believe in you. We want you to experience the deep peace, joy, and love that come through faith in Jesus Christ and membership in his Church. We hope this handbook will help you to better understand what faith in Jesus and membership in the Church truly mean. With Saint Paul we pray "that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). God bless you!



1

Being Catholic The “CliffsNotes” View

Being Catholic means many different things to people. For some people it means a whole culture or way of being in the world. It means Friday fish fries, Advent wreaths and crucifixes, having priests and sisters as friends, and saying the Rosary, among many other things. For these folks, being Catholic is a wonderful way of experiencing God in the world and following Jesus Christ. We hope you know some Catholics like this.

On the other hand, many people’s only understanding of Catholicism comes from what they see and hear in the popular media. They see the priest or

bishop involved in a scandal, the Catholic social activist, and the nuns from *Sister Act*. The media also present us with the travels of popes and the heroic service of people like Mother Teresa and her sisters. The popular image of Catholicism formed by the media is filled with stereotypes and misinformation and is an inadequate source for truly understanding what Catholics are all about.

This book will help you understand what motivates the devoted Catholic and how to figure out what is true and what isn’t true in what you see and hear in the popular media. This chapter begins with some basic facts about Catholics and a

FAQ

- What are some of the core Catholic truths?
- What are some of the core Catholic practices?

Words to Look For

- *Jesus Christ*
- *Bible*
- *Ecumenical Council*
- *worship*
- *Mary*
- *saint*

brief overview about what we believe. But don’t settle for this “CliffsNotes” view of Catholicism. Let it whet your appetite for exploring the rest of the book!

Reflect

Do you know a faithful and committed Catholic? Consider asking the person about what she or he finds motivating about the Catholic faith.

Why Are All These People Catholic?

It is estimated that there are over one billion Catholics living in the world. That is about 16 percent of the world’s population. There are more Catholics than there are people in any other Christian denomination. There are also more Catholics than there are Jews, Hindus, or Buddhists—only Muslims have more members. Catholics and Catholic churches can be found almost anywhere in the world.

So what do these numbers mean? Let’s be honest. On the one hand, they do not necessarily mean anything at all. A religion isn’t necessarily good or true simply because lots of people belong. The truth of Catholicism cannot be determined by how many people are Catholic.

On the other hand, the great number of Catholics in the world testifies to Catholicism’s universal appeal and to the power that the Catholic faith has in people’s lives. Since the Catholic Church’s humble beginnings following the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, it has truly become a worldwide religion. People of every nationality and cultural background embrace it. Surely such a religious tradition must have something compelling to offer.

If you ask a dozen different Catholics what is compelling about their faith, you will probably get a dozen different answers. This is one of the wonderful things about the Catholic faith!

Did You Know?

How Many Catholics Are There?

Catholics in North America

Canada: 14 million Catholics (43 percent of the population)
Mexico: 99 million Catholics (92 percent of the population)
United States: 68 million Catholics (22 percent of the population)

Catholics in the World

Africa: 179.5 million (18.1 percent of the population)
North America: 245.1 million (46 percent of the population)
South America: 336.9 million (86 percent of the population)
Asia: 125.9 million (3.1 percent of the population)
Europe: 284 million (39.9 percent of the population)
Oceania: 9.3 million (26 percent of the population)

(Source: 2012 *Catholic Almanac*)

Its rich tradition provides something for all people, no matter what their particular personality or spiritual need may be. The Catholic Church includes people who desire quiet, meditative prayer as well as those who enjoy communal prayer filled with sound and action. The Catholic Church embraces people who desire a clear and unchanging set of beliefs, as well as those who want to explore how those beliefs are applied to different cultures and a changing world. The Catholic Church is made up of people who provide direct service to those in need as well as people who want to change structures in society to create a more just world.

Live It!

Young People’s Testimony

My first thought is that I am Catholic because I was raised Catholic. But that is not the only reason I am Catholic. Being Catholic is also feeling like I am part of God’s family when I am in my church. It is also important to me that the Catholic faith is the only faith that believes that Christ is in the Eucharist and that the bread and wine are really the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. These are the greatest reasons that I am a Catholic. (Tara, age 17)

Catholicism means knowing you’re never alone and never being left alone. It means knowing that someone is always there, even in spirit. Sometimes at night I like to lie in bed and wonder, “What place do I have in the Lord’s plan?” Without my faith and love in our religion, I would be lost. Catholicism is more than the light in the dark; it’s the light of the world. It’s impossible to conceal because it’s in the hearts of millions. We are all a part of Catholicism’s great mysteries because we are its home—every one of us living and working and praying together. (Laura, age 15)

But if you listen carefully, you will hear some common threads when Catholics talk about what is important to them about the Catholic faith. They often will talk about truths God has revealed and transmitted to us through Scripture and Tradition (more on that in the next chapter). They also talk about the practices of the Catholic faith, the ways in which Catholics pray and make moral decisions. And they talk about the worldview of Catholicism, that is, the attitudes that Catholics display as they live out their faith in the world. Let’s look briefly at these three areas: beliefs, practices, and attitudes.

Reflect

What attracts you to the Catholic faith? If someone asked, “Why are you Catholic?” how would you answer?

Some Core Catholic Beliefs

The following list is meant to give you a quick glimpse of the core beliefs of Catholics. These statements may leave you with many questions. In fact, we hope they raise questions for you, which is why you will find them explained in greater depth in later chapters.

- God created human beings to be in perfect union with him and one another. However, the sin of our first parents—called Original Sin—deprived the human race of our original holiness and justice.
- Throughout human history God worked to restore the relationship of love and trust that was lost through Original Sin. He did this by entering into covenants—special relationships based on mutual promises—with Noah, Abraham, and the people of Israel. But the people often broke their covenant promises.
- Ultimately God sent his only begotten son, **Jesus Christ**, as savior for the human race. Christ is both true God and true man. He became the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of the relationship of love and trust between God and humankind.
- Following his death Jesus was brought back to life in the Resurrection! Christ overcame death and opened Heaven’s gates for all the just.
- The Holy Spirit has been at work in the world from the beginning of Creation to the present day. The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, and is also called the Advocate (Paraclete) and the Spirit of Truth.
- God has revealed himself to be Trinity, that is, the mystery of one God in three Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This was revealed by Jesus Christ.
- Christ established the Catholic Church on the foundation of the Apostles. Christ and the Holy Spirit revealed the fullness of religious truth to the Apostles. The fullness of God’s revealed truth is called Sacred Tradition, and is entrusted to the Apostles’ successors, the Pope and all the bishops of the Church.
- The **Bible**, or Sacred Scripture, is another source of God’s revealed truth for Catholics. The Bible is closely connected

Scripture Connection

A Catholic Worldview

Read Philippians 4:4–9. In this passage Saint Paul expresses a Catholic attitude toward the world. Especially reflect on verse 8: “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

The Bible teaches us that the goodness and love of God is not limited to the Christian faith only. Saint Paul instructs us to discern God’s presence in the world by looking for truth, honor, justice, purity, loveliness, and grace in all people, all relationships, and all social institutions. The presence of these qualities—wherever they are found—should cause us to praise God and rejoice in the many ways he cares for us.

to Sacred Tradition. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Bible to write what God wants us to know for our salvation.

Catholic Wisdom

The Mystery of the Church

On special occasions the Pope calls all the bishops of the world together to address important issues in the Church. These gatherings are called **Ecumenical Councils**, and the last one, held from 1962 to 1965, was called the Second Vatican Council. Here is part of a statement on the Church from that council:

[God] planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. Already from the beginning of the world, the foreshadowing of the Church took place. She was prepared for in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant. Established in the present era of time, the church was made manifest by the outpouring of the Spirit. At the end of time she will achieve her glorious fulfillment. Then, as may be read in the holy Fathers, all just men from the time of Adam, “from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect” will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church. (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 2)

- All people are destined for eternal life after death. The baptized who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as their savior will find their eternal reward in Heaven. Salvation through Christ is also possible for those who seek God with a sincere heart and try to do his will but who do not know Christ, the Gospel, or the Church through no fault of their own. Those who willfully and persistently reject God in this life will suffer eternal separation from God in Hell.

Reflect

Which beliefs from the list of “Some Core Catholic Beliefs” do you best understand? Which of those beliefs do you need to better understand? Look for more thorough explanations of those beliefs throughout this book.

Some Core Catholic Practices

Catholic practices are closely related to Catholic beliefs. Some important Catholic practices in worship and morality could also have been listed as beliefs in the previous section. As in the belief section, the practices listed here are not complete and should raise some questions that will be answered in later chapters.

- Catholics celebrate Seven Sacraments that form the basis of their **worship**, or communal prayer, together. The Seven Sacraments were instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church to make the love of God real and present in the world.
- The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the heart of the Church’s life. In this Sacrament we literally receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the appearance of bread and wine.

- Sunday, or the “Lord’s Day,” is the principal day for the celebration of the Eucharist. Catholics keep the day holy by attending Mass and resting from work, in remembrance of Christ’s Resurrection.
- Catholics follow a special calendar with all the feasts and holy days of the Liturgical Year. The special seasons of Advent and Lent prepare us to understand God’s great love, which we celebrate at Christmas and Easter.
- Catholics place a strong emphasis on living morally because we are called to new life in the Holy Spirit. The moral code for this new life is based on the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes.
- Catholics defend the dignity of human life, and Catholic morality is often described as pro-life. Catholics are opposed to anything that threatens the sanctity of human life, including abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and human cloning.

Saintly Profiles

Mary, the First Disciple

Catholics have a special devotion to **Mary**, the Mother of Jesus Christ. We do not worship her or pray to her as God, as some people mistakenly believe. But we do honor her as the Mother of God, and at times we ask her to approach Jesus with a special need or concern. She is the only person besides Jesus who was born without Original Sin, and at her death we believe she was taken up directly to Heaven.

But Catholics wouldn’t believe any of these things about Mary if we did not first recognize that she was the first follower, the first disciple, of Jesus. Her yes to the angel Gabriel in the Gospel of Luke (see 1:26–38) made it possible for Jesus to come into the world. In the Gospel of John, Mary is the first person to believe that Jesus can work miracles, at the wedding feast at Cana (see 2:1–11). At the cross Jesus calls the beloved disciple, “Here is your mother” (John 19:27), which has the symbolic meaning that Mary is the Mother of all believers. And Mary was present at Pentecost (see Acts of the Apostles 1:14), receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What an amazing woman! What trust she had in God, what heartache she suffered on account of her Son, and what faith she had in Jesus and his message. Mary is a model for all who wish to follow Jesus more closely. She is our loving and patient Mother, and we do well to honor her and ask for her prayers on our behalf—she will never turn a deaf ear to our requests.



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- Serving people in need and working to transform society are essential elements of Catholic life. The Church is called to be a sign of God’s perfect Kingdom yet to come, by working for justice and human rights in this life.
- Catholics honor the great people of faith who have preceded them, the **saints**, and in a dear and special way, Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Pray!

Act of Faith

The Act of Faith is an old and traditional prayer of the Catholic Church. People pray it as a sign of commitment to the core truths of the faith. Can you pray it as a sign of your desire to believe?

My God, I firmly believe you are one God in three Divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe in Jesus Christ, your Son, who became man and died for our sins, and who will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches, because you have revealed them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Amen.

Reflect

Which of the practices from the list of “Some Core Catholic Practices” do you witness in the lives of Catholics you know? How does their example inspire you?

Catholic Attitudes

Because of what we believe and how we live, Catholics see the world in a unique way.

Many Catholics don’t even realize that they have this unique perspective until they spend time with people from other religious or nonreligious backgrounds. See how many of the following attitudes describe your own perspectives:

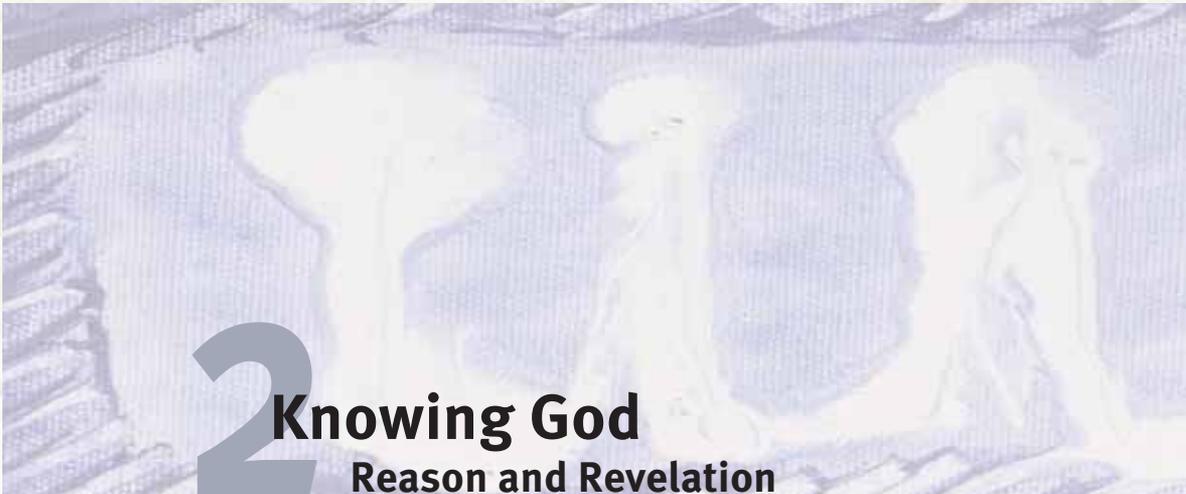
- Catholics recognize that God is present to, in, and through all creation—including the natural world, persons, communities, and historical events. For us all Creation is sacred and has the potential to be a source of God’s grace.
- Catholics place their trust in the essential goodness of the human person, who is made in the image of God, even though we are flawed by the effect of Original Sin.
- Catholics appreciate both faith and reason, both religion and science. Reason can lead us to faith. When we experience conflict between religion and science, it is because we have an inadequate understanding of one or the other.
- Although the fullness of truth resides in the Catholic Church, Catholics seek to recognize and affirm the aspects

of God’s revealed truth that we share with other religions and all people of goodwill.

- Because we are saved by participating in the community of faith—that is, the Church—rather than as isolated individuals, Catholics emphasize community life and communal worship. Though we value and nurture our personal relationship with God, we distrust any spirituality that reflects a primary attitude of “it’s just God and me—I don’t need a Church.”
- Catholicism respects the great diversity of cultures in the world and is committed to proclaiming the message of Jesus to all people in all cultures at all times.
- Catholics respect and embrace a wide variety of spiritualities and prayer forms.

Review Questions

1. Approximately how many Catholics are there in the world today?
2. Through what two sources is God’s Revelation transmitted to us?
3. How did Original Sin affect the relationship between God and human beings?
4. What did God establish with his people to try to restore the relationship of love and trust that was lost through Original Sin?
5. Describe the importance of Jesus Christ in two or three sentences.
6. What does it mean to say that God is Trinity? Name the three Divine Persons in the Blessed Trinity.
7. How does a person attain salvation?
8. Describe three practices and three attitudes that Catholics follow and value.



2 Knowing God

Reason and Revelation

Do you remember pestering your parents to let you do something you really wanted to do but they didn't want you to?

Even after they said no and explained their reasons, you kept asking: "Why? Why not? Come on, why?" If your parents are like most parents, at some point their patience wore out and they simply answered, "Because I said so, that's why!"

Would you believe that there is a parallel to this common relationship between parent and child in the truths held by the Catholic Church? The Church makes frequent appeal to human reason in teaching us about the religious truths God has revealed. But reason can take us only so far in explaining the great mysteries of life and of religious truth. Ultimately we must trust that God has revealed to the Church what he wants us to know for our salvation. In this chapter we explore our need for God and how we can come to know the truth about God.

FAQ

- How can I know about God?
- How do we know what is true in the Bible?

Words to Look For

- *canon*
- *reason*
- *natural revelation*
- *Divine Revelation*
- *covenant*
- *Sacred Tradition*
- *Sacred Scripture*
- *Holy Spirit*
- *Gospel*
- *Deposit of Faith*
- *Magisterium*
- *inspiration*
- *inerrancy*

Our Need for God

When you take a moment to look at what you really want from life, what do you think about? Most people name things like a happy family, success in work, a comfortable life, good health, and so on. Now look a little deeper and ask, “What do these things symbolize for us?” Don’t they really symbolize our need to be loved and accepted for who we really are—and our need to return love, to make a difference in the world and in people’s lives?

Consider one more thing. Literature and movies are full of stories about people who have everything that one could desire—and yet they are still unsatisfied, they still seek something more. Could it be that our need to be loved and to return love, and the emptiness we feel even when we have everything the world tells us we need, are signs of our need for God? The simple truth is that we are by nature religious beings, and each of us has an empty place—a God-shaped hole—that can never be filled by anything less than God. We are made to live in spiritual union with him, in whom we can find true happiness. Perhaps Saint Augustine said it best when he said, “For you have made us for yourself, [God], and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

Reason and Revelation

Well, if we all have God-shaped holes, how do we discover God, who alone can fill them? One way people have been doing it for all human history is to use our natural gifts of observation and **reason**. When confronted by an awesome display of a star-filled night or by the overpowering experience of being truly loved by another person, we know that we are in touch with something far greater than just what we can see and touch. Reason tells us that something had to

Did You Know?

The Canon of the Bible

In the first centuries of the Church, quite a few letters and gospels existed that Christians used for information and inspiration. It was the responsibility of the early popes and bishops, guided by the Holy Spirit, to determine which of these books were truly inspired. Pope Damasus, at the Council of Rome in AD 382, determined the official list of books, sometimes called the **canon**, that make up the Catholic Bible. That list is complete, so no more books can ever be added or taken away.

Catholic Bibles have seven more books in the Old Testament than do most Protestant Bibles. This goes back to a disagreement over whether to use the original Greek or the Hebrew version of the Old Testament. The Greek version, has been accepted by the Church since the time of the Apostles and contains the Books of Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch. These seven books are sometimes called the Apocrypha (Greek for “hidden”) or the deuterocanonical (Greek for “second canon”) books. Many Protestant churches later decided to use the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, which does not contain these books.

Pray It

Story of the Man and the Birds

Now the man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge, he was a kind, decent, mostly good man. But he just didn't believe that Jesus was God who had been born into the world as a man. "I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He said he'd feel like a hypocrite.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. When he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds that had been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window. Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he hoped to direct the birds to his barn for shelter.

Quickly he tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms. Instead they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn. And then he realized that they were afraid of him. He wished he could think of some way to let them know they could trust him.

"If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to the safe, warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see and hear and understand." At that moment the church bells began to ring, pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he sank to his knees in the snow (adapted from a story shared by Paul Harvey).

create such order and possibility. Or when we experience the voice directing us to act lovingly and generously instead of selfishly—reason tells us that something greater than us is responsible for placing that voice within us.

The Bible speaks about this experience of God through the created world. For example, many of the Psalms proclaim God's presence in works of nature: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; /and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul writes this about God: "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (1:20).

When we listen to the message of Creation and to the voice of conscience, every person can come to certainty about the existence of God. We call this process **natural revelation**. Through natural revelation we can know the one true God from his works, that is, from the world and from the human person. This is one reason why salvation is possible for every person, even those who have never heard of Jesus Christ.

Yet human reason rarely seems like it is enough by itself to come to know God. Pope Pius XII put it like this:

The human mind, in its turn, is hampered in the attaining of such truths, not only by the impact of the senses and the imagination, but also by disordered appetites which are the consequences of Original Sin. So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful.¹ (CCC, 37)

So how do we overcome this gap created by the limits of human reason? Well, we cannot

overcome it, but God can! In his great love, he has revealed himself to us in order to restore the communion that human beings were created to have with him, before the relationship was broken by Original Sin.

In **Divine Revelation** God makes himself and his divine plan known to the human race through words and deeds in human history. This Divine Revelation is communicated to us in the Bible's accounts of how God made himself known to the Chosen People by acting throughout their history. But when those attempts met with failure, God took a radical step. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to be our savior. While remaining fully God, Jesus Christ took on a human nature, that is, he is both true God and true man. Thus Jesus Christ is the fullest and complete Revelation of who God is, and through Christ, God established his **covenant** with the human race forever (more on this later). As the Bible tells us, "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

The Church teaches everything we need to know about God; everything we need to know for our eternal union with him has been revealed in Christ. Nothing more needs to be added or taken away—although we keep coming to new and deeper insights by reflecting on everything Jesus did and taught. But how do we, who live so many centuries after Christ, know who he is and what he revealed about God? God has provided two ways for coming to know Jesus Christ: **Sacred Tradition** and **Sacred Scripture**.

Reflect

Take a moment to meditate on the idea that God was willing to take the radical step of becoming fully man to communicate with us. What a tremendous sign of his love! What are some signs of God's love in your life?

Live It!

Reading the Bible: The PRIMA Process

Having an effective strategy for reading the Bible can make the difference between giving up and staying on course. We call one such method the PRIMA process. *Prima* is the Latin word for "first." In the PRIMA process, each letter of the word stands for a step in studying the Bible, either individually or with a group:

- **Pray.** Begin with a prayer that your time with the Bible will draw you closer to God.
- **Read** attentively, trying to hear the words as if for the first time. Reading the passage aloud, even if you are alone, can help with this.
- **Imagine** being part of the story you just read. What would you feel? How would you react? Do you know anything about the background of the story that can help you understand what the author is trying to get across?
- **Meditate** on what you have read. How does the message of the story fit in with the rest of the Bible's teaching? with the Church's teaching? What do you think God is teaching you?
- **Apply** what you have read to your life. God may be calling you to make a change in your life. Or you may find encouragement that you need during a difficult time. Carry God's Word into the rest of your day!

Scripture and Tradition

Christ promised to send the **Holy Spirit** to his closest followers, the Apostles, after he physically left them to ascend into Heaven: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles remembered and handed on everything they knew about Jesus to the first Christians and to the generation of leaders who followed them. The passing on of the Good News of Jesus Christ is called Sacred Tradition, or the Apostolic Tradition, or sometimes just Tradition.

As the years passed, the Holy Spirit inspired people in the early Church to create written documents explaining what the Apostles had handed down about Jesus. The **Gospels** were written, and each Gospel gives a slightly different faith perspective on the meaning of Jesus Christ’s life and teaching. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were collected with some letters written by Paul and other early Church leaders and the Book of Revelation to form the New Testament of the Bible.

As you follow this explanation, it is hoped you will see that the Bible, particularly the New Testament, is really a written portion of the Apostolic Tradition. We speak of Scripture and Tradition as two modes of Revelation, but they are closely connected and together form a single sacred **Deposit of Faith** given to the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They can never be in conflict, and each one helps us to understand the other.

The Church looks to God’s Revelation in Scripture and Tradition as the only authentic and complete source for our knowledge about God and God’s will for the whole human race. It is the responsibility of the Church, through her teaching, her worship, and her ministries, to transmit to every new generation all that God has revealed. As the successors of the Apostles, the teaching office of the Church—the bishops in union with the Pope, who are also called the **Magisterium**—bears the particular and exclusive responsibility to faithfully teach, interpret, and preserve Scripture and Tradition for all believers until Christ returns in glory.

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This is a seventeenth-century painting of Saint Matthew, showing him writing the Gospel. What might the angel at the top of the painting symbolize?

Faith is necessary for salvation. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). God has revealed himself to us so that we might have faith in Jesus Christ and the One who sent him. It is through God’s grace that we have the gift of faith. The Deposit of Faith contained in Scripture and Tradition nurtures our growth in faith and teaches us how to live as Christ’s disciples.

Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation

Something that has been a source of conflict between Catholics and some other Christians is the way Catholics interpret the Bible. This conflict has its roots over different understandings of biblical **inspiration**. All Christians recognize that God is the ultimate author of the Bible because the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors in their writing. But some Christians—sometimes called fundamentalists or literalists—believe that every part of the Bible must be absolutely true in every way: historically true, geographically true, and scientifically true. Thus, for example, they believe that God created the world in six twenty-four-hour days.

The Holy Spirit inspired the biblical authors to write what God wanted us to know for our salvation. The Holy Spirit did not take over the biblical authors’ humanity when they wrote. Thus the authors were subject to natural human limitations, and they also used their human creativity in their writing. To continue the example above, Catholics recognize the religious truth that God created the world and everything in it, without believing that the world was literally created in six twenty-four-hour days. Catholics understand that the Bible is without error in communicating what God wants us to know for salvation without having to be historically and scientifically correct in every detail. This is the dogma of biblical **inerrancy**.

Catholic Wisdom

Sola Scriptura!

Sola Scriptura means “Scripture alone,” and it was a rallying cry for some of the Protestant reformers who broke away from the Church in the 1500s. They felt that by appealing to Tradition, Catholic religious leaders were exercising a biased control over the Church, and the only truly objective source for God’s Revelation was the Bible. So they rejected Tradition as a source of Revelation and tried to make their case for Scripture alone. This disagreement over the source of Revelation continues to be a major difference between Catholics and many Protestant Christians today. However, through patient dialogue, the different Christian churches are more tolerant and appreciative of one another than they have been in centuries.

When we read the Bible, we must keep two important goals in mind. First, we seek to “investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended” (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 12). To do this we consider the literary form of the passage we are reading, the historical situation of the author, and the ways that people spoke and acted in that culture.

Scripture Connection

“I Handed On to You”

In Latin the word for tradition literally means “to hand on.” In the New Testament, we can see evidence of Sacred Tradition being “handed on.” Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. In this passage Saint Paul says, “Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which you also stand. . . . For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received” (15:1,3). As an Apostle, Paul taught others the sacred truths that had been revealed to him through the Holy Spirit. In this passage Paul summarizes those truths in the form of a simple creed: Christ died for our sins and rose again to eternal life.

As one of the Apostles, Paul handed on Sacred Tradition through his preaching and also through his writing. You might also want to take a look at 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, another passage in which Paul “hands on” another central truth of our faith.

Second, as we encounter Scripture at Mass or in our private reading, particular tools of interpretation can be helpful in our understanding. These have been developed by the Tradition of the Church. They are called the senses of Scripture.

The first sense is the literal sense. The literal sense is what the words of Scripture actually mean. All the other senses of Scripture are based on the literal meaning (see *CCC*, 116). Because Scripture is the living Word, in addition to the literal sense, there is the spiritual sense. The spiritual sense has been developed by the Tradition of the Church and is often the reason certain Scripture passages are chosen for various celebrations or seasons of the Liturgical Year. The spiritual sense is the meaning expressed by Scripture when we read it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in the context of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The spiritual sense goes beyond the literal sense to consider what the realities and events of Scripture signify and mean for salvation.

Three kinds of spiritual senses can be applied to Scripture: the allegorical sense, the moral sense, and the anagogical sense. Using the allegorical sense of Scripture in the account of the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea, for example, the Church sees not only the literal meaning but also the added allegorical meaning of the Red Sea as an image for Baptism.

Using the moral sense of Scripture, the Church encourages us to act on the instructions and encouragement we receive from Scripture to do good and act justly. Using the anagogical

sense of Scripture, we are led from considering scriptural events to considering events in our lives that are significant for our salvation. For example, when we read about the New Jerusalem in Sacred Scripture, we are led to think about the Church on earth as that New Jerusalem, leading us to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Understanding the meaning of a Scripture passage requires that we consider how the passage we are reading fits in with the rest of the Bible, what the Church teaches about the meaning of this passage, and how the meaning of the passage is connected to the entire Deposit of Faith. Reading the Bible is very important, but it also requires some work to understand all that God is revealing through its words.

Reflect

Have you ever been inspired to write a poem or story, compose a piece of music, or paint a picture? How is this kind of inspiration similar to the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the biblical authors? How is it different?

Saintly Profiles

Saint Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274)

Saint Thomas Aquinas is one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Church. His mind was so keen that it is reported he could dictate to four scribes at the same time—each scribe working on a different chapter—picking up exactly where he had left off as he moved from one to the other. His most famous work, the *Summa Theologica* (Latin for “Synthesis of Theology”), is still studied today. His work was considered radical for his time and was initially condemned because he drew on the works of any author—including Jewish and pagan writers—who had something true to say. However, within fifty years of his death, Aquinas's writings became the standard for most scholarly study. Despite Aquinas's genius he was given the nickname “dumb ox,” because of his large size and silent ways.

Evidently Thomas Aquinas's family did not approve of his decision to become a Dominican priest. After he first entered the monastery, his brothers kidnapped him and held him captive. They attempted to seduce him with an attractive woman to make him sway from his calling. But Saint Thomas had a deep faith, as well as a great mind, and he was not swayed from his calling. He is a perfect example of the Catholic understanding that faith and reason can coexist. We celebrate Saint Thomas Aquinas's feast day on January 28.



Review Questions

1. How does natural revelation help us to know God? Why is natural revelation limited in its ability to help human beings know God and his plan?
2. What is Divine Revelation? How is it communicated to us?
3. Describe the role the Church plays in helping us to know God.
4. Define *Sacred Tradition* and describe its connection to Sacred Scripture.
5. Who is the Magisterium and what role does the group play in handing on the faith?
6. Define *biblical inspiration*.
7. What are two important goals that Catholics must keep in mind when reading and interpreting the Bible?

3 The Bible's Big Picture

God has a plan, and we are all part of it. If this is true—and it is—then it follows that we should know his plan and its ultimate goal. God makes this possible for us by revealing himself and his plan for our salvation in a privileged way through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. In particular, the events of God's Revelation in history are recorded in Sacred Scripture, God's inspired Word. Most of this book is devoted to helping you understand the Tradition of the Catholic Church. However, you will better appreciate Sacred Tradition if you understand the big picture of God's relationship with the human race, as told in the Bible. This big picture is called **salvation history**, because it shows how God has worked within the people and events of human history to achieve his ultimate goal: restoring our lost union with him. This chapter provides a basic understanding of salvation history.

As you read through this overview, you will probably notice how human disobedience to God's Covenant and God's Law keep getting in the way of the fulfillment of God's plan. Despite these setbacks, God reveals in Scripture that his goal will ultimately be fulfilled. Further, each one of us is an active

FAQ

- What is salvation history?
- What is the Bible all about?

Words to Look For

- *salvation history*
- *covenant*
- *Israelites*
- *Law*
- *canticle*
- *Parousia*
- *Old Testament*
- *New Testament*

participant in God's plan; we cannot choose otherwise. The question is whether we will be working in support of God's plan or against it.

Reflect

How familiar are you with the Bible? Find an approved Catholic translation of the Bible, such as the *New American Bible, Revised Edition*, and open it up to the table of contents. Scan the list of books for any that look familiar. Use the Bible to look up some of the Bible passages referred to in *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*.

The Big Picture of Sacred Scripture

The books in the Bible are a mix of religious history, poetry, wise sayings, symbolic stories, songs, and other kinds of literature. Although some books provide an orderly sequence of events, presented in chronological order, others do not. All of the books of Sacred Scripture, however, are the inspired Word of God and are a source of prayer for us. When studied as a whole, the books of the Bible reveal for us a picture of God's gift of himself through his saving love and his plan for our salvation. What follows is a brief overview of that plan. This overview follows the most common way that salvation history is divided into different periods.

Primeval History

Salvation history begins with Creation. The first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis contain what the *Catechism* calls figurative language, that is, symbolic images and accounts used to express great truths. These chapters are also sometimes called "primeval" history, meaning that these events happened long before there was any recorded history. In these chapters we learn that God created the world and all that is in it, and that all God's creatures are good and lived in harmony with one another and with him. Further, the first three chapters of Genesis reveal that God's Creation was good, ordered, and harmonious, without sin or human death. In these chapters we learn that the sin of our first human parents, Adam and



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The original books of the Old Testament were written in Hebrew on scrolls, usually one book on one scroll. In Jewish worship services, the Scripture is still read from scrolls like the one pictured here.

Eve, injured their perfect relationship with God and with each other. This Original Sin is passed on to all human beings and makes it more difficult for us to choose good and to choose God.

In chapters 4–11 of Genesis, the accounts of Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the tower of Babel teach us that sin spreads and that without God's help, sin leads to death and destruction. But despite our sin and disobedience, God begins a process of intervention to save us. To the serpent, who represents Satan, he says

“I will put enmity between you
and the woman,
and between your offspring and
hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

(Genesis 3:15)

This is the first promise of a coming savior who will triumph over the power of evil. Then after the Great Flood, God makes a special promise, called a **covenant**, with Noah and the whole human race—a promise to never destroy the world by flood again.

The Patriarchs

In the period of the patriarchs, God begins to form a special relationship with a chosen race of people. At this time most of humanity does not recognize the one, true God. So God makes a Covenant with a man named Abraham. He promises that Abraham's descendants will be as numerous as the stars, and that through them “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Abraham and his wife, Sarah, experience several crises in which it appears that the Abrahamic Covenant will go unfulfilled: famine, war, Sarah's barrenness, even a test that involved the near sacrifice of their only son, Isaac. But each time God steps in to ensure that the people he has chosen survive.

The accounts of Abraham and Sarah's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren show us the same pattern of



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The Israelites
crossing the Red
Sea.

Live It!

Make a Plan for Reading the Bible

There is more than one way to read through the Bible. Some people try reading it from the beginning to the end. Often, though, people who try reading the Bible this way don't make it very far. They get confused and quit because some of the books in the beginning of the Old Testament are difficult to understand. Here are two suggestions for other ways you can make a plan for reading the Bible:

1. Because understanding Jesus' life is key, start by reading one of the Gospels, perhaps the Gospel of Mark, as it is the shortest. Then read Genesis to get the beginning of salvation history. Then jump back to the Acts of the Apostles to understand the start of the early Church. Then jump back to Exodus to see how God's saving power saved the Israelites from slavery. By jumping back and forth between New Testament and Old Testament books, you can start to see how the two Testaments are connected.
2. Read the Sunday readings every week. You can find the readings listed in a missal or church bulletin or on the United States bishops' Web site. Sure, you hear these read at Mass on Sunday, but by reading them on your own, you can study them more deeply and meditate on their meaning. The Sunday readings are on a three-year cycle, so after three years you will have read most of the four Gospels and a good section of the Old Testament and the letters of the New Testament.

crisis and God's faithfulness. Their son, Isaac, had difficulty finding a suitable wife. There was the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau, Isaac's sons, that nearly led to violence. Jacob's older sons sold their youngest brother, Joseph, into slavery. Yet in an amazing story of reconciliation and forgiveness, Joseph—whom God had led to become the pharaoh's chief adviser—welcomed his father and brothers, providing them food and a place to live during another famine. Jacob's sons went on to become the patriarchs (founding fathers) of the twelve Tribes of Israel.

In the ancient world of the Bible, a patriarch was the male leader of a tribal group and was responsible for the group's survival. Ideally, he was a benevolent and strong father figure, who was obeyed without question by the members of the tribe. The matriarch was his most important wife, who had authority over the women in the tribe. In the biblical use of the term, the patriarchs are the original ancestors of God's Chosen People, the Israelites. Namely, they are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons.

Egypt and the Exodus

At the beginning of the Book of Exodus, we discover that the descendants of Jacob's children—now called **Israelites**—are in slavery in Egypt. God hears their cries for deliverance and calls Moses to lead them out of slavery to a Promised Land. God also reveals his sacred name, Yahweh, to Moses. But Pharaoh, the Egyptian leader who is also seen as a god, has a hard heart. He refuses to release the Israelites from captivity. Yahweh proves he is the one, true God, and that his purpose will be achieved despite human effort or opposition, by sending ten plagues upon the Egyptians. After the last terrible plague, Pharaoh lets the Israelites

leave Egypt (although he has second thoughts). The Israelites' escape from Egypt and their journey to the Promised Land is called the Exodus.

On the way to the Promised Land, the Israelites stop at Mount Sinai. There a key event in salvation history occurs. In a dramatic theophany (a physical manifestation of God's presence and action in human history), God extends the Covenant he made with Abraham to all the Israelites, promising that they will be his Chosen People. A special **Law**, summed up by the Ten Commandments, marked this Covenant.

During the Exodus the people frequently complain and lose their faith in God. As a consequence they must wander in the desert for forty years, and only their children will be able to enter the Promised Land (with two exceptions, Joshua and Caleb). Even Moses is not able to enter the Promised Land, dying while on a mountain overlooking it.

Settling the Promised Land

God calls on Moses' protégé, Joshua ("Jesus" is another form of his name), to lead the people into the Promised Land. Much of the land is inhabited by immoral people. The Israelites must fight to gain control. When they trust God, they are successful in their battles; when they do not trust God, they fail. Eventually they gain control of the land, and Joshua divides the land among the twelve Tribes.

New invaders try to capture the land. At this time the Israelites have no king, because God is their ruler. A pattern develops: (1) the Israelites forget about God and are unfaithful to the Covenant; (2) they suffer at the hands of invaders; (3) they cry out to God for help; (4) God calls special leaders and warriors, called judges, to help deliver justice and defend the land against the invaders; and (5)

Catholic Wisdom

The Word of the Lord

In 2008 Pope Benedict XVI asked for a gathering of bishops from around the world, called a synod. The main focus of their gathering was to discuss the use of Scripture in the Church. At the end of the synod, the bishops had fifty-five recommendations for improving the Church's use and understanding of Scripture. Two years later Pope Benedict released an apostolic exhortation, or papal teaching, based on the recommendations. It was called *The Word of the Lord (Verbum Domini)*. Here is a passage in which the Pope gives an explanation of how Jesus Christ is the center of salvation history:

We can contemplate the profound unity in Christ between creation, the new creation, and all salvation history. To use an example, we can compare the cosmos to a "book" . . . and consider it as "the work of an author who expresses himself through the 'symphony' of creation. In this symphony one finds, at a certain point, what would be called in musical terms a 'solo.' . . . This 'solo' is Jesus. . . . He is the center of the cosmos and of history, for in him converge without confusion the author [God] and his work [salvation]." (13)

life is good for a while until the Israelites lapse into unfaithfulness and the cycle begins again. Deborah, Gideon, and Samson were some of the more famous judges. Unfortunately, with each cycle the violence gets worse and the judges are less holy. The Book of Judges ends with a horrible rape, which leads to a war between the Israelite tribes.

The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel

Eventually the Israelites want their own king. God reluctantly answers their request. He has Samuel—the last of the judges—anooint Saul as the first king of Israel. At the same time, Samuel warns the people of the dangers of kings. Saul has many problems and is eventually killed in battle. David follows Saul as the second king. David is a mighty warrior and a charismatic leader. He unites all the twelve Tribes into one kingdom and drives out

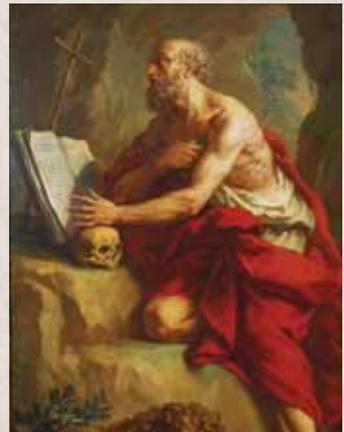
Saintly Profiles

Saint Jerome (345–420)

Saint Jerome is traditionally honored as the most famous biblical scholar in the history of the Church. He was well educated and well traveled. As a young man, he tried several different vocations: he lived as a monk for a few years, then became a hermit, and later was ordained a priest. Having already learned Greek, during his years as a hermit, he also learned Hebrew in order to study Scripture in its original languages.

Jerome became known for his work as a translator and for his biblical commentaries. In his late thirties, he was appointed Pope Damasus I's secretary and adviser. During this time he began his greatest work, translating the Bible from its original languages into Latin, the common language of his time. This task would take him over forty years to complete. The Latin Bible he translated became known as the Vulgate, and it became the primary translation used by the Church for over a thousand years.

Jerome experienced several conflicts in his life. He could be judgmental and sarcastic, and this occasionally made him enemies. While he was in Rome, he became the spiritual adviser to a small community of wealthy widows. Some people falsely accused him of having improper relations with one of these women. Jerome eventually settled in Bethlehem, where he spent the last thirty-three years of his life praying, writing, and translating. He is the patron saint of librarians and scholars, especially biblical scholars. His feast day is September 30.



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Israel's enemies. After David's death, one of his sons, Solomon, expands the kingdom and the capital city, Jerusalem. Solomon is noted for his wisdom and for building a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem where the Israelites could worship God.

Despite their many positive accomplishments, both David and Solomon are guilty of serious sins in building the kingdom, succumbing to the temptations of violence, adultery, and idolatry. After Solomon's death there is disagreement between the tribes, and the kingdom splits in two. The northern kingdom is called Israel and the southern kingdom is called Judah. Many of the kings of Israel and Judah worshipped foreign gods and allowed injustice in the kingdom. So God called prophets to urge the kings and the people to obey their Covenant with God. Prophets like Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah called the people to stop worshipping idols, to practice justice, to worship God with integrity, and to care for people in need. The sayings of the "writing prophets"—the sixteen prophets who have books named after them—were collected and are part of the Old Testament.

Several kings in Judah—notably Hezekiah and Josiah—made religious reforms and strove to end the worship of gods and goddesses like Baal and Asherah, tearing down the high places and sacred groves where they were worshipped. Yet despite these reforms and the prophets' warnings, the people of Israel and Judah continued to turn away from God's Covenant. So God let their kingdoms be conquered and their rulers be overthrown. The Assyrians conquered Israel in 721 BC. The Babylonians conquered Judah in 587 BC, completely destroying Jerusalem and the Temple.

The Exile and Return

Following the Babylonian conquest of Judah, the nation of Israel was no more. Many of the Israelites were taken into

Pray It

Praying the Canticles

Some of the best known prayers in the Bible are known as **canticles**. A canticle is a song and refers to hymns that appear in the Bible (besides the Psalms). Some of the most famous canticles are the following:

- the Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1–18)
- the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:2–31)
- the love songs in the Song of Songs
- the Song of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:52–90)
- the Canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1:68–79)
- the Canticle of Mary (*Magnificat*) (Luke 1:46–55)

These are beautiful prayers that you can look up and pray yourself. The last two prayers in the list are from the New Testament and are recited in the Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours (see chapter 37, "Praying Together"). See chapter 36, "Praying with Scripture," for more suggestions on praying with Scripture.

captivity. Because of this, the period is called the Exile. Prophets like Ezekiel and Second Isaiah comforted the Israelites with the promise that God was still with them. They foretold the coming of a savior who would lead the people to peace.

Fifty years passed in exile. Then a new Persian king allowed the people—now called Judeans or Jews—to return to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The people saw God's hand at work in the king's decision. Ezra and Nehemiah tell of the struggles and successes the Israelites experienced in this process.

In the fourth century BC, the Macedonian king Alexander the Great conquered Persia, Egypt, and the rest of the Middle East, including Israel. He settled Greek colonists in many of these regions, spreading the Greek culture and Greek influence throughout the empire. After Alexander's death, one of his Greek governors tried to establish Greek culture in Israel. This included placing statues of Greek gods in the new Temple in Jerusalem. In response, around 150 BC an outraged Jewish family, the Hasmoneans (also called the Maccabees), led a successful revolt against the Greeks, briefly restoring Jewish independence.

During this troubled time, the common people in Israel hoped for a messiah, or savior, to make them great again. New Jewish groups also developed during this time, such as the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. Each of these groups emphasized a different approach to faithfully living the Jewish faith.

Scripture Connection

Salvation History Told in the Bible

There are several passages in the Bible that give a short version of salvation history. Peter does this in the Acts of the Apostles 3:11–26, and Paul does so in Acts 13:16–41. The most complete version in the New Testament is Hebrews, chapter 11. Find this chapter and read it. Who are the biblical figures that are used as examples? What periods of salvation history do they come from? Look again at the first three verses of the chapter, especially the first verse, which says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." What is the main point of the chapter?

Reflect

How familiar are you with the Old Testament? Based on the different periods of salvation history discussed in the text, which period would you be most interested in reading about?

The Life of Jesus Christ

God never abandoned his Chosen People, even though so often they did not keep their part of the Covenant. The Gospels of

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell of how, when the time was right, God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. This is the ultimate event in salvation history. Jesus was a Jew, a member of the Chosen People, and a descendant of King David. But he was also the Word Made Flesh, the Second Person of the Trinity, the complete and final Word of Revelation in God's saving plan. All Scripture bears witness to him and his saving work.

When Jesus was born, the Romans ruled Israel. Some of the Jews were hoping for a mighty warrior and king like David, who would drive the Romans out. Instead, Jesus showed a different way. He preached love, justice, and forgiveness. He healed and worked miracles as signs of God's power.

Jesus' followers, called disciples, gradually came to understand that he was the Messiah (meaning "anointed one"), the Savior the prophets had predicted. Simon Peter was designated by Jesus to become the leader of twelve of Jesus' closest male disciples, the twelve Apostles. A group of women disciples also followed Jesus and supported his ministry. These early disciples were the first members of the Church, founded by Jesus. Jesus taught his disciples that salvation comes through faith in him and a life of love, not through violence and political power.

When Jesus was killed by the Romans—with the approval of the Jewish leaders—his followers thought that all was lost. Instead, after three days Jesus was raised from the dead! The Resurrection confirmed that Jesus was the Son of God, confirmed that everything he taught was true, and confirmed that through him sin and death had been conquered forever. God established his New Covenant with the human race through Christ Jesus' sacrifice: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). All the baptized who put their faith in Christ will share in his Resurrection. God's original plan for Creation is now brought full circle as we anticipate the fullness of the Kingdom of God in which perfect goodness, harmony, love, and joy will be present for all eternity.



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In one of his letters, Saint Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17). Why is Christ's Resurrection essential to our faith?

Did You Know?

The Languages of the Bible

The Bible was not written in any modern language. This chart shows the main languages of the Bible.

Language	Books of the Bible Written in This Language
Ancient Hebrew: This was the language the ancient Israelites spoke and wrote.	Almost all of the books of the Old Testament.
Ancient Greek: This was the language that educated people in Israel spoke and wrote during the first century.	All the books of the New Testament and seven books of the Old Testament: Tobit, Judith, First and Second Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and parts of Esther and Daniel.
Aramaic: This was the language that the common person spoke in first-century Israel.	Although no complete books of the Bible were written in this language, some parts of Ezra and Daniel were first written in Aramaic, and some Aramaic words, such as <i>abba</i> , <i>mammon</i> , <i>rabboni</i> , and <i>hosanna</i> , are used in the New Testament.

Reflect

How well do you know the Gospels? Choose one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), and make a commitment to read a chapter a day.

The Early Church

After his Resurrection, Jesus instructed the Apostles to go and spread the Good News of salvation to all people. After Jesus ascended to Heaven, the Holy Spirit descended upon Peter and the other Apostles, with Mary present among them, at the event we call Pentecost. The Holy Spirit gave them the courage to tell others about Jesus Christ. They began preaching to other Jews, convincing many that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Because of this, many of the Apostles were persecuted by Jewish leaders who saw them as blasphemers to the true Jewish faith.

Paul, who was one of those Jewish persecutors, had a vision of the resurrected Jesus and became a Christian. In Paul's vision, Christ revealed to Paul that he came for the salvation of all people. After Paul's conversion and acceptance by the Christian community, he began taking long missionary journeys with other Christian missionaries to preach the Good News to both Jews and non-Jews (who were called Gentiles). These early missionaries were men and women like Barnabas, Timothy, John, Phoebe, Junia, and the married couple Priscilla and Aquila. Wherever they traveled they started new Christian communities. They wrote many letters of instruction, correction, and encouragement to these communities and their leaders, some of these letters becoming part of the New

Testament. Soon Christianity spread throughout the whole Roman Empire—even to Rome itself.

The Last Things

In the Gospels, Jesus talks about a time of tribulation that will precede the end of all things. Until this time occurs, the Church continues to spread the Good News of God's saving love through both words and actions. The fullness of God's Revelation, Jesus Christ himself, is reflected in the life and teaching of the Catholic Church. The members of the Church are called to participate in God's saving work, which makes the Kingdom of God present; incompletely in this life but in its perfection in our life after death. Jesus taught that at the end of time, there will be a Final Judgment: the righteous will join him in Heaven and the unrighteous will be condemned to eternal separation from God in Hell.

The final book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation (the Apocalypse), is about the battle between good and evil, God and Satan. Written in symbolic language, it is filled with images of disasters, heavenly worship, angels, saints, terrible beasts, and Jesus Christ leading the final battle against evil. These symbolic images reflect the persecution of the early Christians in the Roman Empire, but they also remind us that these persecutions continue to happen throughout history. But Revelation is a book of hope. It promises that God will triumph over Satan, evil will be banished, and God will establish a new Heaven and a new earth, free from the sin, violence, and death that have plagued humankind since Adam and Eve. The perfect union that God planned for us to have since the beginning of Creation will finally be accomplished. Christians call Christ's second coming in glory to fully establish his Kingdom the **Parousia**. Revelation ends with the prayer that is the prayer of all Christians, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

The Organization of the Bible

Even though the Bible looks like a single book, it is really an anthology, a collection of individual books written at different times by different people. These books are organized into

sections, and being familiar with these sections makes it easier to find your way around in the Bible. The following chart will help you understand this organization.

<p>The Old Testament is primarily the account of God's Chosen People, originally called Israelites and today called the Jews. So most of the books of our Old Testament are also in the Jewish Scripture. The Old Testament in Catholic Bibles has forty-six books divided into the following sections:</p>	
<p>The Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy)</p>	<p>These five books are the core of the Old Testament. They tell about Creation, sin, and the origin of God's Chosen People.</p>
<p>The Historical Books (Joshua through 2 Maccabees)</p>	<p>These books tell how the Israelites settled in the Promised Land. They also tell about the Israelites' great—and not-so-great—kings.</p>
<p>The Wisdom Books (Job through Sirach [Ecclesiasticus])</p>	<p>These are books of poetry and the collected wisdom of the Israelites.</p>
<p>The Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi)</p>	<p>These books are the collected speeches and biographies of Israelite prophets. The prophets spoke for God against idolatry and injustice. They also spoke God's words of comfort and promise when the Israelites were suffering for their disobedience.</p>
<p>The New Testament is about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the Church. It has twenty-seven books divided into the following sections:</p>	
<p>The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)</p>	<p>These four books are the most important books for Christians because they convey Jesus Christ's teachings and the meaning of his life, death, Resurrection and Ascension.</p>
<p>The Acts of the Apostles</p>	<p>This book is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke (they were written by the same author as a two-volume set) and tells about how the early Church spread.</p>
<p>The Epistles (Romans through Jude)</p>	<p>These are twenty-one letters, written by Paul and other early Church leaders. They give teachings and guidance to individuals and the first Christian communities.</p>
<p>The Book of Revelation</p>	<p>This book records the visions of an early Christian named John. The visions are about the battle between God and Satan and God's triumph over evil.</p>

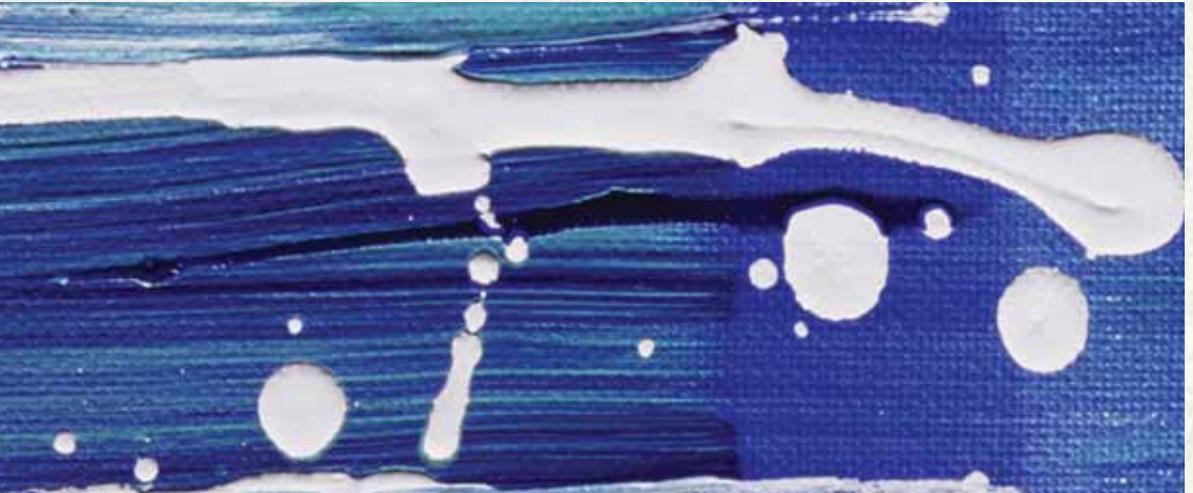
Reflect

What is your favorite passage from the Bible? What message does that passage have for your life and for your relationship with God?

Review Questions

1. Define *salvation history*.
2. Describe the key events that occur in the primeval history period of salvation history.
3. Describe the key events that occur in the Egypt and the Exodus period of salvation history.
4. Describe the key events that occur in the kings and prophets period of salvation history.
5. Describe the key events that happen in the early Church period of salvation history.
6. How does all of salvation history find its fulfillment in the saving work of Jesus Christ?
7. What is the Parousia?
8. What is the Old Testament? Describe the four sections of books you will find in it.
9. What is the New Testament? Describe the four sections of books you will find in it.





Part A

The Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Amen.



4 Faith

Jesus once told his disciples, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20). Did Jesus mean that if we can’t work spectacular miracles, we do not have faith? Of course he didn’t. Jesus was using a figure of speech, an exaggeration, to make a point. In Jesus’ time a person who could “move mountains” was a person who could make difficult things easy to understand. Jesus seemed to be telling us that all difficulties can be overcome if you have true faith in him.

Stories like this illustrate that having **faith** is extremely important to Jesus. He talks about it numerous times in the Gospels. So it is no surprise that faith is a central part of the Church’s teaching. But what does it mean to have faith? Why is it so important?

This might be easier to think about if we put it in another context. Consider that faith and trust are closely related. Sometimes the two words are used interchangeably. When you say to your parents, “Just trust me!” what you are probably

FAQ

- Why is faith necessary for salvation?
- If God knows everything, then he knows what I am going to choose. Do I really have free will?
- Do people who don’t believe in God automatically go to Hell when they die?

Words to Look For

- *faith*
- *denomination*
- *Church*
- *salvation*
- *creed*
- *Nicene Creed*
- *ecumenism*

saying is, “Have faith in me, believe in me!” We all want other people to believe in us, to approve of who we are and what we do. Why? Because when we know that people we care for approve of us, we also feel their love.

Following this line of thought, you can see how closely related faith, trust, and love really are. If a person trusts us, it is easier to believe that he or she really loves us. And if we trust in another person, it becomes easier to love him or her without holding back. What happens if we take this concept and apply it to God?

Faith Is Our Response to God’s Love

It all comes down to this: “We love because [God] first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The Bible teaches us that God formed the universe as a joyful, free, creative expression of his love. As the crowning act of Creation, God made human beings, creatures that are more like him than is any other created thing. Because of this we have greater free will than any other part of creation. We can consciously choose good or evil; we can even choose to believe in God or not to believe in God. He did not create us as robots who have to be good or who even have to believe in him. So when we struggle to believe in God, or struggle in making a moral choice, we are being exactly what God created us to be—creatures who must make choices.

In giving us freedom, God also gave us the ability to give and receive love. Any being that cannot make its own decisions about what to believe in or how to act is not capable of self-giving love. Unfortunately the effects of Original Sin confuse our ability to make totally free choices. We are too easily fooled into believing sinful choices are good choices. This limits our ability to love.

But God never gives up on us. Throughout human history God has revealed himself so that we might see him more clearly

Did You Know?

Those Who Do Not Know Christ

What about a person who has never heard of Jesus? Would God condemn that person for not believing in something he or she never heard of? “In ways known to himself”¹ (CCC, 848), God can lead people to faith who have not had the opportunity to know Christ and the Church. And those who “seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will”² (CCC, 847) may receive eternal life. In other words, we know that faith in Jesus has been revealed as the way to Heaven, but we also believe that God’s love and mercy is not limited by our understanding!

and exercise our freedom to choose good, to choose him. As his final Revelation, God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Christ is the ultimate sign of God's love for us and of how we are to love God and one another.

In a very real sense, if we fully understand Christ and his message and we still reject him, then we are rejecting God's efforts to be in a loving relationship with us.

God's Revelation of himself, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ, is his loving invitation to us to be in a relationship. We respond to that invitation with trust, with faith in all that God has revealed, particularly through Jesus Christ. With our hearts we give ourselves in complete love to God. With our intellect we believe what he has revealed

in Scripture and Tradition. And with our wills, we act on what we believe by choosing to do good and avoid sin. This sounds a lot simpler than it really is—all the great saints tell us that it takes a lifetime, and then only with God's help!

Reflect

This chapter began with the claim that Jesus said all difficulties can be overcome if we have true faith in him. What are some difficulties you need to overcome in your life? What gifts, skills, or insights could you ask Jesus for, so he could help you overcome these difficulties?

Faith and the Catholic Church

Faith is a personal act. Each person is free to believe or not to believe in what God has revealed. But belief is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone. For one thing, other people pass on God's Revelation to us. Parents, teachers, and clergy teach us about Scripture and Tradition. They witness to us how their faith in God has made a difference in their lives. Through their words and actions, they support and nourish our faith. This is the way the Catholic faith has spread for two thousand years. These faithful believers have passed faith on from generation to generation by their word and example.



Saint Peter walking on the water is a classic biblical story about having faith in Jesus.

Some people make a distinction between faith and religion. They claim that they can have faith, that they can be spiritual, without belonging to the Catholic Church or any other organized religion. But this is a difficult theory to support. True, every person is spiritual and can perform spiritual practices like prayer without belonging to a church. But having true faith means believing everything that God reveals; it doesn't mean picking and choosing the things we want to believe. And Scripture and Tradition teach that he wants us to be part of a church, a community of believers. Here are some reasons why:

- Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church in a special way, revealing the full truth of the Gospel message.
- The Church provides the human mechanism through which God's Revelation—Scripture and Tradition—is passed on and safeguarded.
- The Sacraments that Jesus instituted are celebrated in community so that the people receiving the Sacraments are more closely united with the community.
- We need the support and encouragement of other believers to live the Gospel message even when it is difficult and challenging. (Remember what Jesus said about faith and moving mountains?)
- Throughout the New Testament, the followers of Christ are commanded to “love one another” as an example to the rest of the world. Only as part of a Christian community can we give effective witness to the love of God.

For all these reasons and more, it is clear that faith in Christ means being a baptized and active member of the Catholic Church. Although Catholics recognize that they are not the only Christian community with gifts to offer the world, the Catholic Church is

Live It!

Believe!

Belief is a popular theme in stories and movies. Think of the belief that children have in the stories of Peter Pan or Santa Claus. There is something powerful and compelling in the idea of having faith in something or someone. In most of these stories, belief makes all the difference. It makes something crucial happen or fail to happen. For Catholics, having faith does make all the difference. Even though we struggle with the particulars, having faith is like saying: “Yes, God! I believe in your love for me!” When we can say that, a road of adventure and promise opens up before us, a journey beyond our imagination.

Think about Jesus' Mother, Mary, or the Apostles, or any of the saints. How different would their lives have been without faith? What work was God able to accomplish through them because they said “Yes, I believe”? What work might God accomplish through you because you say “Yes, I believe”? Many of the great saints had their doubts and questions and spoke about them freely. It is through the struggle with our doubts that we come to deeper faith. If we never ask the questions, how can we get to the answers?

the original church founded by Christ after his Resurrection. Only the Catholic Church has the unbroken connection with the original Apostles. Only the Catholic Church passes on

God's Revelation complete and unchanging.

The Catholic Church has a special unity with other Christian churches. All Christians share "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). All Christians are brothers and sisters to one another. By our Baptism we all share a sacramental bond of unity and a common life in Christ, even though significant differences exist among different Christian churches, or **denominations**. Catholics are encouraged to practice **ecumenism**, that is, to work toward overcoming those differences and to build unity with other Christians. We do this by praying together, serving the community together, and honestly searching for God's truth together.

Catholic Wisdom

Other Religions

What can we learn from other religions? How do they understand God? If we believe differently, does that mean they're wrong? In the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the bishops of the world defined the Catholic Church's positive understanding of other faiths and our relationship to them:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all [people]. (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, 2)

When we talk with friends about our faith and listen to them talk about their faith, we often come away with a deeper understanding of those people, of God, and of our own experience. In a similar way, the Pope and the bishops want the Catholic Church to be in dialogue with other religions. We will know God and the Catholic faith more deeply as we seek to understand the beliefs of other religions.

The Characteristics of Faith

Let's summarize: Faith is the human person's response to God's loving invitation to believe in him. Faith means giving yourself completely—heart, mind, and will—to a loving relationship with God. Faith also means believing in and being part of the Church, which is the Body of Christ here on earth. The **Church** also teaches some other things about faith, which are summarized as follows:

- **Faith is a grace, a supernatural gift of God.** This is a fancy way of saying that we don't initiate our relationship with God but that he is the one who initiates it. In fact, without the Holy Spirit's help, we wouldn't be able to recognize God's invitation or respond to it.

- **Faith is certain.** God is trustworthy, and everything he reveals is trustworthy, even when it does not make complete sense to our human reason. The teachings of our faith are more trustworthy than any human knowledge.
- **Faith seeks understanding.** True faith means having a passion for always wanting a deeper and clearer understanding of God. It is an ongoing process: the more we understand God, the deeper our faith will be. And as our faith deepens, we become more committed followers of Jesus Christ.
- **Faith is not opposed to science.** God created both physical reality and spiritual reality, and the two can never truly conflict. The humble and honest seeker will see the hand of God in both the world of science and the world of religion.
- **Faith is necessary for salvation.** By definition **salvation** means having our relationship with God restored to what he intended it to be from the beginning. But as was said earlier, faith in God is a necessary part of having a truly loving relationship with him. Thus without faith we have cut ourselves off from God, and that means no salvation. Without faith in God, even if a person had all the exterior signs of a good and upright life, she or he will not be saved. (Just remember that God is always there to take us back!)
- **Grace enables faith.** We are able to have faith because God first gives us the grace to believe. The Holy Spirit makes this grace available to all people.
- **Faith is the beginning of eternal life.** Through faith we deepen our relationship with God. Through faith we experience the joy and love that come with being part of a community of believers. Through faith we get a preview of what Heaven is like.

Pray It

Prayer of Unknowing

Thomas Merton, born in France in 1915, eventually became an American citizen, a scholar, a Catholic, and in 1941 a Cistercian monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani, in Kentucky. Merton is considered one of the most influential spiritual writers of modern times, and his autobiographical book *The Seven Storey Mountain* is a spiritual classic. He wrote the following famous prayer, which shows he had learned that his doubts could still lead to faith:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. (Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, page 83)

Reflect

Some people try to use science to prove there is no God. Others try to use science to prove there is a God. How would you explain the relationship between science and belief in God?

Scripture Connection

Faith Versus Good Works

Maybe you have debated with friends the question of whether salvation comes from faith alone or from faith and good works. Christians have argued this question for centuries. The Bible helps us answer this question. Read Ephesians 2:1–10. Pay particular attention to verses 8–10. The writer of Ephesians makes this point clear: We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We are not saved by doing good works but in order to do good works. Our salvation is God's gift to us; how we live our faith is our gift to God. You might also want to read James 2:14–26 for additional insight on this question.

Creeds Are Statements of Faith

The chapters in this section are based on the statements of the Apostles' Creed, found on the first page of this section. A **creed** is a brief summary of the things you believe in. Christians use creeds as a type of prayer that summarizes the beliefs of our faith, a summary of the things that God has revealed. One of the very first creeds we have is in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (15:3–5)

Notice how simple this formula is. The focus is primarily on the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The Apostles' Creed isn't found in the Bible, but it is very old, dating back to the early Church in Rome, the city in which Peter settled to become the first Pope. It contains belief statements about all three Persons of the Trinity, as well as a statement about the Church. It reflects the early Christians' growing understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and the importance of the Church in God's plan. Because of this it is one of the most important statements of faith in the Catholic Church.

The Church has other important creeds. The one you are probably most familiar with is the **Nicene Creed**. Catholics around the world recite the Nicene Creed every Sunday at

Mass. It is also an old creed, dating back to the end of the fourth century AD. It is longer than the Apostles' Creed and contains more statements about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is because in the fourth century, some significant conflicts arose in the Church about Jesus' identity and the role of the Holy Spirit (see "Mistaken Identity: Heresies about Christ," on page 91). The Nicene Creed affirms the beliefs that were clarified as a result of those conflicts.

As a young person, you are growing in your faith and learning more about the Catholic faith. Using the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed as an outline is an excellent way to explore those beliefs. This is why the first sections of the *Catechism* and this handbook are based on those creeds. Please use the chapters in this section to explore your questions and deepen your understanding of Catholic beliefs. God has given you the gift of faith, but only you can decide to accept that gift and act on it.

Saintly Profiles

Saint Helen (ca. AD 250–330)

Helen was the mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine. She married the Roman general Constantius Chlorus. In AD 292 he divorced her to marry the emperor's stepdaughter. Helen's ex-husband and eventually her son each became emperor. Her son, Constantine, is known as the patron saint of the Church. After his conversion to Christianity in AD 312, he legalized Christianity, made generous donations to the Church, erected numerous basilicas (churches), and even called the bishops together for the first Ecumenical (worldwide) Council in Nicaea in AD 325.

Helen, who also became a Christian in AD 312, is the patron saint of converts. She was over sixty years old at the time of her conversion, and was attentive to the needs of poor people, orphans, and those in prison. She visited the Holy Land and founded many churches on sacred sites, including the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem and at Bethlehem. She is often pictured with the cross, both because she did much to spread the Christian faith and because tradition connects her with the discovery of the cross of Christ. Her feast day is August 18.



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Reflect

The Apostles' Creed is a statement of the beliefs taught by the Apostles and held by the early Church. The Nicene Creed is a statement of Christian beliefs developed by two Ecumenical Church Councils (in AD 325 and 381). Look up these two creeds in the Catholic Quick Facts section. What additions to the Apostles' Creed do you find in the Nicene Creed?

Review Questions

1. What is faith? How are faith and human freedom related?
2. Why does true faith in God require a belief in Jesus Christ?
3. How is faith passed on from generation to generation?
4. Why is being an active member of the Church a necessary aspect of having faith in God?
5. What is ecumenism, and how do we practice it?
6. Name three characteristics of faith, and describe in your own words what they mean.
7. What is a creed? Name two different creeds, and explain why they are used by the Church today.



God Our Father

The Apostles' Creed starts out with a very simple statement: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." This statement is at the foundation of everything that Christians believe. But how many Catholics have really stopped to analyze this statement? How many of us could really give a reasonable explanation of who God is and what God wants from us?

Some people—called **atheists**—claim there is no God. They point out that scientists cannot prove God's existence. And they point out all the evil in the world and ask, "So how can there be a God?" If we are honest, it isn't just atheists who have these questions. To varying degrees, seeking Christians at some point in their lives also ask themselves, "How do we know there is a God?"

The Church's answer is both simple and complex. We know that human beings cannot discover God purely on their own power. We can make a case that it is reasonable to believe in God (see the article "Proofs for the Existence of God," on page 58), but we cannot prove God's existence in a scientific way. So the Church's simple answer is that we know about God because God has chosen to reveal himself to us.

FAQ

- How can there be three Persons in one God?
- Does God have a gender?
- What are angels?

Words to Look For

- *atheist*
- *Blessed Trinity*
- *monotheism*
- *Lord*
- *Creator*
- *Original Sin*
- *angel*

But as we try to understand what God has revealed to us, the answer becomes complex. So much of what we know is in the negative. We know things such as God *is not* a creature like us, God *has no* beginning or end, and God *is not* subject to the limitations of space and time. Even when God reveals himself, God remains a mystery beyond words. To help us understand the mystery of God, we use images of and stories about things that we can see, hear, and touch in order to understand God, whom we cannot directly see, hear, or touch. This chapter looks at some of those images and stories to deepen our understanding of God.

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In this famous image, painted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, God passes the spark of life to Adam.

Reflect

Consider the questions posed in the first two paragraphs. What reasons do you have for believing in God? How would you describe God to a friend?

The Trinity: One God, Three Persons

Let's start with the foundational image that God has revealed to us, the **Blessed Trinity**. The Trinity is the mystery of one God in three Divine Persons. It is the central mystery of the Christian faith, and we call it a mystery because it cannot be understood by reason alone—God has made it known to us. Belief in one God is called **monotheism**. But the belief in the Trinity distinguishes Christians from other monotheistic religions (like Judaism and Islam), because these religions do not believe there are three Persons in one God.

The belief in one God comes to us through our Jewish ancestry. One of the primary prayers in the Jewish faith is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel: The **LORD** is our God, the **LORD** alone. You shall love the **LORD** your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (6:4–5). This was truly a unique revelation. Other ancient peoples—the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans, for example—believed in and worshipped a collection of gods and goddesses. God revealed himself to the Chosen People as the one and only God.

But how did we come to believe that there were three Persons in the one God? This belief came later and was revealed by the life and words of Jesus Christ. First the Apostles came to understand that Christ was God. The Gospel of John says, “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (1:18). A little later the Apostles came to know and understand that the Holy Spirit was also God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf” (15:26).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three Gods, but one God. To use philosophical terms, they share the same “substance” or “essence.” Yet we believe that the three are also distinct from one another. They are really three different “Persons,” not just three ways of describing how God works.

On the other hand, when we describe their roles, we do think of the Father primarily as Creator, the Son as Savior, and the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier (the one who helps us become holy). Yet we must remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are inseparable from one another and they all share in the “work.” For example, both Christ and the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father, were present at and part of the Creation of the world.

Are you confused yet? Don’t be alarmed if you are; great minds have been struggling to understand the mystery of the Trinity for more than two thousand years! Just remember this: The central thing that the Trinity teaches us is that God is not solitary. God exists as a communion of Persons who perfectly communicate with one another and perfectly support one another. If this is true for God, it is also true for us, who are made in God’s image and likeness. We are made for community; acknowledging our need for other people is honoring the Trinity! Striving to be in good, honest, supportive

Pray It!

Trinity Sunday

On the Sunday after Pentecost, the Church celebrates Trinity Sunday. This Collect from the liturgy for this feast day speaks about the mystery of the Trinity:

God our Father, who by sending
into the world
the Word of truth and the Spirit of
sanctification
made known to the human race
your wondrous mystery,
grant us, we pray, that in profess-
ing the true faith,
we may acknowledge the Trinity
of eternal glory
and adore your Unity, powerful in
majesty.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in
the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
(Roman Missal)

Did You Know?

Proofs for the Existence of God

Saint Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274), known as a Doctor of the Church, developed the following five proofs (*quinque viae*) for the existence of God:

1. Life is in motion. For life to be in motion, there must have been a “first mover” to get everything going. That mover is God.
2. An egg cannot just cause itself to be an egg. There must be a cause outside the egg (in other words, a rooster and a hen!) that causes it to be an egg. Likewise there must be a first cause outside all creation that caused creation to come into existence, and that first cause is God.
3. For the possibility of everything else to exist, by necessity there had to be something in existence first. This something we call God.
4. There is something we call truest and best against which we measure everything else that is true and good. This something isn’t just an abstract concept but is God.
5. The order in nature isn’t just a happy accident. An intelligent being exists to direct all things to their natural end, and this being we call God.

These are not scientific proofs, but they are arguments based on philosophical reason. Saint Thomas Aquinas is trying to let us know that something greater than humankind must have set Creation in motion. This something we call God, because by definition God is greater than anything else we can imagine.

relationships isn’t just a nice thing to do, it is part of what we must do if we are truly to become the image of God we were created to be.

The Father Almighty

Let us now turn our attention to the First Person of the Trinity, God the Father. Have you ever wondered why we call God “Father”? It is an old and honored title that many religions use for God. But Christians claim it in a special way because Jesus used it frequently to describe his own unique relationship with God: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). Jesus is God the Father’s divine Son, who has existed with the Father for all eternity. When Jesus Christ took on human nature, he was able to reveal his Father to us in the way that only a child can speak about a parent.

Further, in the Bible accounts, Jesus called God “Abba,” an Aramaic word for father that families used (see Mark 14:36 and Galatians 4:6). It was sort of like calling God “Dad” or “Papa.” It implied an intimate and loving relationship with God. To think about God this way was a challenge for many of the Jews of Jesus’ time because they thought about God primarily as a judge or king. Many Christians today take for granted the image of God as a loving Father, but if it hadn’t been for Jesus, we might never have had this understanding.

When we call God “Father,” we address a loving parent who transcends human distinctions. The *Catechism* says, “God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by

the image of motherhood,¹ which emphasizes God's immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature" (239). The Bible also contains many feminine images of God. But the reality is that God transcends, or is bigger than, the distinction we make between the sexes. Although Catholics honor in a special way the image of God as loving Father, we recognize that any human image we have of God is incomplete.

Finally, let us not forget the adjective that describes God the Father in the Creed: *almighty*. No creature, no power, and no force anywhere in creation is more powerful than God is. In describing this we sometimes say God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (present everywhere), and omniscient (all-knowing). Yes, God is our Father, but he is also an awesome, powerful force worthy of our praise and worship: "Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD, / or declare all his praise?" (Psalm 106:2).

Creator of Heaven and Earth

Another reason Christians call God "Father" is that it acknowledges God as the **Creator**—the Father—of everything that is. Though science seeks to explain the how and why of the physical processes of creation, science cannot explain the why of creation. The why is revealed to us by God himself. God did not need to create the world but freely chose to do so. Nor did God start with anything or have any help in forming the world; he created it out of nothing. By creating the world and all that is in it, God wishes to share his love and goodness with every creature—but especially with us, the people he created in his image. God's plan for all creatures to live in loving union with their creator is what the

Catholic Wisdom

The Problem of Evil

If God is all good, why did he create a world with so much pain and suffering caused by natural disasters and by the evil choices human beings make? The *Catechism* has an excellent response to this question that can only be summarized here. For the entire answer, check out paragraph numbers 309 through 314 of the *Catechism*.

- The problem of evil is pressing and unavoidable, and no quick answer will suffice for those who have experienced pain and suffering. Only the Christian faith as a whole provides the answer to the question.
- God could have chosen to create a world so perfect that physical evil did not exist, but in his wisdom and goodness he created a world that is still journeying to its ultimate perfection. This means that physical evil will exist alongside physical good until creation reaches its ultimate perfection.
- God also chose to give men and angels free will so that we could journey freely to our ultimate destiny. Besides making good choices that bring greater love into the world, we can also make sinful choices that bring evil into the world. God does not in any way cause moral evil, but he respects our freedom by allowing us to choose it.
- Finally, and this is the cause of our hope, nothing is so evil that God cannot cause a good to come from it: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28). All the saints affirm this truth.

Garden of Eden represents. And for those who see the world with the eyes of faith, creation itself gives witness to God's love and wisdom.

Scripture Connection

God Is Love

God is love; this is a sacred truth revealed by God through the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. The early Church embraced this truth and wrote about it. This is especially true in the writings that are traditionally associated with the Apostle John. Read 1 John 4:8–21. Note how the letter describes the implications of the simple statement, “God is love” (4:8). All our relationships must be rooted in this reality or they will be empty and without meaning. You might also look at Jesus’ speech at the Last Supper (see John, chapters 14–15) to see how Jesus describes the implications of the truth that “God is love.”

Reflect

If God is the creator of everything that is, how do you explain the existence of evil?

For love to be truly love, though, it must be freely given and freely received. So God created human beings with the freedom to choose love and goodness. The dark side of that freedom is that we can also choose hate and evil. Our original parents, Adam and Eve, made a choice to reject God's love, and their **Original Sin** disrupted God's plan for creation. But God never abandoned us. He continued to work in the created world to restore his loving union with the human race. Through God's “new creation” in Jesus Christ, this restoration will be fulfilled.

The Catholic teachings about Creation answer the two most fundamental questions we have as human beings: “Why am I here?” and “What is my ultimate destiny?” Knowing that God created the universe out

of love and to communicate his glory, we know that we are here because of God's love and to share in God's truth, goodness, and beauty. God's plan is that we should spend eternity joyfully in perfect union with him. A later chapter will explore this more thoroughly.

Another important thing that we believe about Creation is that a reality exists that lies beyond our senses. In the Nicene Creed, we say that we believe in God, “maker of all things visible and invisible.” Knowing of an unseen part of reality opens us up to the miraculous, to understanding that God is at work even when we may not see any evidence at the moment. Although we should be very careful about making claims about what belongs to the unseen order of Creation, we know about one thing for sure: the existence of **angels**.

Angels are every bit as real as you and me, but they are beings of spirit, not matter. They have intelligence and will, they have individuality, and they are immortal. The word *angel* comes from the Greek *angelos*, meaning “messenger.” Angels’ sole purpose is to be God’s servants and messengers and to glorify God without ceasing. The Bible tells of angels in both the Old and the New Testaments and even gives three of their names: Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. We believe that angels unite with us in praising God when we celebrate the Eucharist and that angels watch over each of us, from conception to death. Most Catholics find it very comforting to know that we are united with these unseen servants of God.

Reflect

How does the description of angels in this chapter compare with the way angels are portrayed in popular books and movies?

God Is Truth and Love

In the famous story of Moses and the burning bush (see Exodus, chapter 3), God reveals his name to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM.” This name for God means that God alone IS, that he is perfection of all that is and needs nothing else to be. Everything else in creation is dependent on something else for its existence, but not so with God. In fact, God keeps the entire universe in existence at every moment. Without the Trinity to sustain and uphold creation, it would simply cease to exist.

Taken by itself, “I AM WHO I AM” does not describe a personal and loving God. But many other references in the Bible describe God as faithful and loving. For example, God tells Moses that he is “merciful and gracious, / slow to anger, / and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6). God tells the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute and remain faithful to her, “just as the LORD loves

Live,
It

Does God Make a Difference?

Think about the events of 9-11. One of the stories of that day tells about the group of people on the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania. These people prayed Psalm 23 before taking action against the terrorists who hijacked the plane. This plane was probably headed for Washington, D.C. Think of the greater destruction that would have occurred if this plane had hit the White House or other government buildings.

Their faith gave the group on this airplane the courage to act. And their act—even though it cost them their lives—probably saved countless numbers of people, possibly including many of the nation’s leaders. If we have faith, God gives us the courage and strength to do things that normally would be beyond our capability. Read Psalm 23 and try to discover why the group on the plane might have chosen this psalm. How does your faith in God make a difference in your life?

the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods” (Hosea 3:1). And the First Letter of John tells us that “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1:5) and “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (4:8).

God is truth. God is love. In the end these two statements probably say more about God than anything else we could say. Our God will never deceive us or lie to us. And most important, God loves us more than we could possibly imagine. The love of the people in our lives is often imperfect and limited; even mothers and fathers can hurt us cruelly. But the love of our divine parent can never fail us. “O give thanks to the God of heaven, / for his steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 136:26).

Saintly Profiles

Blessed Julian of Norwich (ca. 1342–1420)

Julian of Norwich was an anchoress (from the Greek word for *recluse*) who lived a life of solitude and contemplation. Julian stepped away from worldly activity to spend her days contemplating God. As part of her daily life, she lived only on prayer and the essentials of food and shelter. Julian lived in a cell attached to the Church of Saint Edmund and Saint Julian in Norwich and was visited by pilgrims from all over England. She was famous for her compassion and optimism. She is said to have received sixteen visions on the Passion of Christ, on the Trinity, and other mysteries of faith. These visions are described in her *Book of Showings*, also known as the *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Julian used images familiar to the people of her time to describe the tremendous love of God. Many of her descriptions were feminine, such as her image of God as a wise and nurturing mother who protects us from harm. For Julian everything was about God’s love, which she believed was best expressed in the Passion of Jesus. Despite the fact that she lived during the horrible plague, which killed millions in Europe, one of her most famous prayers speaks of her complete faith and trust in God and ends with the comforting words, “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” Her feast day is May 8.



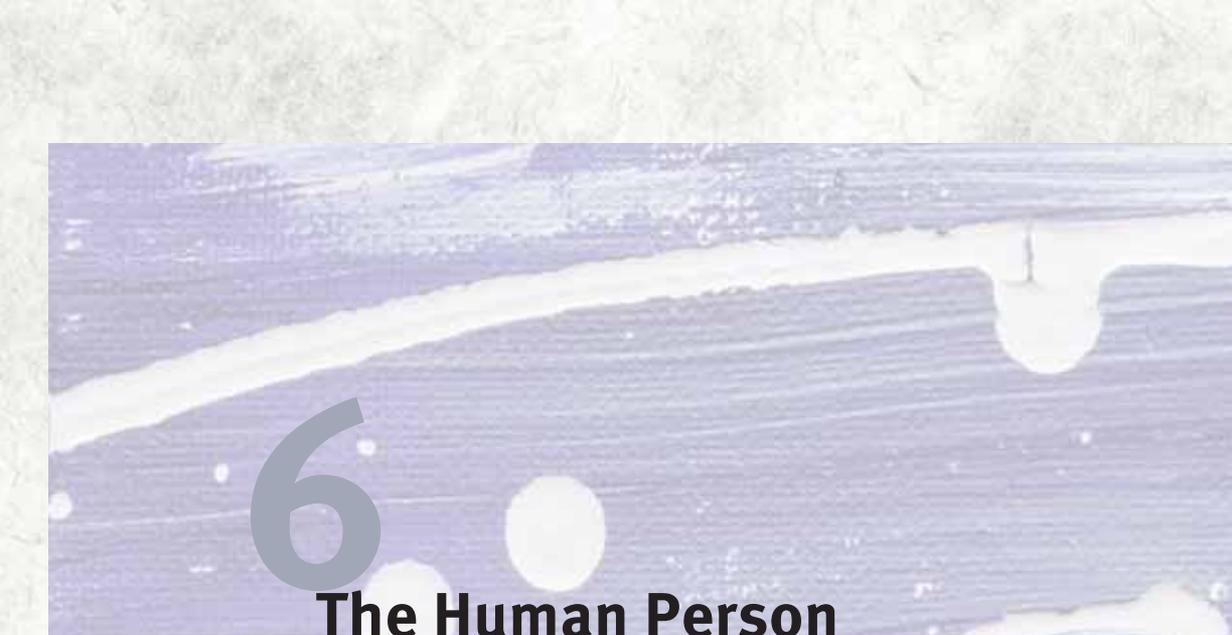
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Reflect

We sometimes say that God is both very close to us (immanent) and yet also far beyond anything we can truly describe or experience (transcendent). When does God seem close to you? When does God seem mysterious and even confusing?

Review Questions

1. What is the central mystery of the Christian faith, and what does it teach us about God?
2. What does the Trinity teach us about human relationships?
3. What was the Aramaic name Jesus used when he spoke of God? List several reasons why Christians call God “Father.”
4. What is Original Sin, and what happened because of it?
5. Who are angels, and what is their purpose?
6. What did God tell Moses his name was? What does this name mean?
7. List several other Scripture passages that describe God. In light of those additional Scripture references, what two statements might best describe who God is?



6

The Human Person

If you are like most people, you probably have good days and bad days. On the good days, you feel connected and at peace. You are aware that life is good, and you know that the Almighty has blessed you. Your own life has purpose and meaning, and you know that you are loved and cared for.

The bad days are a little different. On the bad days, you feel anything but peace. You feel used and abused and misunderstood. You aren't sure that anyone really cares; you might even feel that your life has little meaning or purpose. Sometimes it doesn't take much to move us from a good day to a bad day. It might just be someone's barbed comment or a disappointing grade on a test that makes us start to feel bad about ourselves.

God has something to say to us about those bad days. Scripture and Tradition are very clear about this: God loves every person—without exception—and every human person has infinite value in God's plan. God's love doesn't depend on what you've done or how you feel. As we grow in faith, we understand this more and more. And though we remember that God's love may not stop those bad days from happening, it can help make them easier to get through!

FAQ

- Why did God create me? Do I have a purpose?
- Why do I want to do things that I know are wrong?
- Does the Devil, or Satan, really exist, and what do we know about him?

Words to Look For

- *Creation*
- *soul*
- *stewardship*
- *the Fall*
- *concupiscence*

Made in the Image of God

At times in life, most people ask the same fundamental questions: “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” Sadly some people do not accept the existence of God as a starting point in trying to answer these questions. They reject the answers provided by the Christian faith. The Christian faith starts from the simple premise that we are creatures and that God is our creator. So if you want to know who you are and why you are here, start by looking at the Creator’s Revelation in Scripture and in Tradition.

For the Catholic faith, an important starting point in answering these questions is the beginning of the Bible, the Book of Genesis. The Book of Genesis actually has two different **Creation** accounts in its first chapters. Each account has something unique to tell us about God’s plan for human beings.

The first Creation account tells how God created the whole world in seven days (see Genesis 1:1—2:4). Well, actually six days, because God rested on the seventh day. You’ve probably heard or read this Creation account many times. The important thing isn’t really about what God created when, as some Christians want to emphasize. They take the story too literally, and try to read scientific meaning into it. For example, they want to use it to prove that evolution never occurred. But because it is pretty obvious that the biblical author didn’t write this as a science lesson, it is misleading to read the account in this way.

The key Creation event happens on the sixth day. On that day God created man and woman. But they weren’t created like the animals. No, instead the Bible tells us, “God created humankind in his image, / in the image of God he created them; / male and female he created them” (1:27). Human beings are the crown of God’s Creation. Made in the image of God, we have special gifts and capabilities that go beyond all other creatures. We have self-awareness and self-knowledge. We alone are capable of knowing God and freely returning God’s love. It was for this that God created us, that there



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A contemporary artist painted this vision of the Garden of Eden. What do you think the Garden of Eden might have looked like?

Did You Know?

Satan

What do you believe about Satan? Is he just a mythical creature used as a plot device in horror movies? Satan, or the Devil, is a very real force of evil who was once a good angel, also called Lucifer, meaning “being of light.” Satan pitted his will against the will of God, and as punishment was cast from Heaven. He seeks to draw us into his rebellion against God, which is why we make promises to reject Satan and all his empty promises.

It might surprise you to learn that the earliest stories about Satan did not portray him to be fighting against God (see Job 1:6 and Zechariah 3:1). Rather he worked in God’s heavenly court as a sort of prosecutor, testing human virtue by inflicting misfortune, to gauge the virtuousness of human reaction. The word *Satan* comes from a root word meaning “accuser.”

Over time Satan’s work of testing virtue becomes active involvement in doing evil. Satan becomes a powerful controller of the forces of evil, acting out of hatred for God and humankind. He tempts people (see 2 Corinthians 2:11), he has the power to kill (see Hebrews 2:14), and he has influence in the evil that leads to Jesus’ death (see John 13:2). But Satan is only a creature, and as such is subject to the power of God. In the death and Resurrection of Jesus, God overcomes the evil of Satan, now and forever. Whenever you find yourself tempted to cooperate with evil, ask the Holy Spirit to give you strength to resist Satan’s influence—God will give it to you!

would be creatures who could freely know and love him. Among all God’s creatures, we have a dignity that is permanent and meant for eternity.

God is our parent every bit as much as our physical parents. How can this be? We are both physical and spiritual beings. At the moment of our conception, the combined DNA from our human parents created our physical body. But at the same time, God created the spiritual principle that animates our spiritual lives and makes us truly human. We call this spiritual aspect of human beings the **soul**. The soul is immortal, and it is not separated from the body—our body and our soul are completely united. Just as we carry the genetic imprint of our physical parents, we carry the spiritual imprint of our spiritual parent.

The first Creation account also teaches us that human beings are not meant to be alone (this is also taught in the second Creation account). God did not create just one person but two: “In the image of God he created them; / male and female he created them.” In the original Hebrew language, the poetic structure of this phrase suggests that it is only when men and women are together that we are most fully in the divine image. Just as the three Persons of the Trinity live in perfect community, so we also must live in loving community with others to be all that God created us to be. And the partnership of men and women is the primary form of human community.

Finally, the first Creation account teaches us that God gives human beings a special responsibility for caring for creation: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over

every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). God created a huge diversity of creatures, each with its own goodness. We are only now learning just how many different species of life there are! All plants and animals live together in a complex and orderly web of life. At the center of this web stands the human race, and we are beginning to understand how our choices either help preserve this web of life or destroy it.

Even though the Bible uses verbs like *subdue* and *have dominion*, that doesn't mean God wants us to use nature and other creatures selfishly and destructively. It really means the opposite, that we have a special responsibility, called **stewardship**, to honor and preserve creation. God is counting on us to make wise use of the earth's resources and creatures and to protect them from destruction.

Reflect

Think about times when you have felt worthless or unloved or unsure about what your purpose in life should be. How could reminding yourself that God created you in his image and likeness—that in God's eyes you have infinite value—make a difference?

The Fall from Grace

The second Creation account is in Genesis 2:4—3:24. This is the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. Unlike the first Creation account, in the second, man is created first, then all the animals, and finally woman. Like the first Creation account, it teaches that God gave us a spiritual soul by the symbolic action of breathing life into Adam (see 2:7). It also teaches that man and woman need each other to be complete (see 2:23) and that human beings are to cultivate and care for creation (see 2:15). But then it goes even further.

In the second Creation account, God places Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden symbolizes

Live It!

Overcoming Temptation

Why are cartoon superheroes often pitted against a villainous master of disguise? Such plots point to the fact that evil often masquerades as something else. How true when it comes to temptation! Gossip presents itself as a way to appear popular, sexual activity outside marriage pretends to be true love, and drinking alcohol appears to be a way to have fun or fit in. With all these clever disguises and more, how can you see temptation for what it really is and avoid it?

Saint Augustine would tell us that the root of most temptations is a hunger or a need that only God can fill. He said, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, [God].” If you want to stand up to temptation, get to know the hungers in your heart, such as a need for being in control, for attention, or for fitting in. Then follow Jesus' lead and trust in God's care to fill your hungers (see Matthew 4:1–11).

the ideal relationship that God intended to have with human beings. In the Garden there is no pain, no death, and no shame. Adam and Eve see God face-to-face. They are in a perfect state of holiness and justice. They are friends with God, and from that friendship flows their happiness.

Pray It

Prayer for Accepting Our Humanity

I am a person like no one else in the world.

I am the people I have met.

I am the experiences I have had.

I am the mistakes I have made and the wisdom I have gained from them.

I am the lessons I have learned and the ones I have given.

I am the good times in my life and the bad ones too.

I am the emotions I have felt and the thoughts I have thought.

God, I am the life I have lived. Although it's not a perfect one, understand that I'm doing the best

I can with what you have given me. Because all that I have to work with . . . is me.

(Tom Moore,
in *Dreams Alive*, page 24)

But then something terrible happens.

Eve is tempted by a serpent to eat some fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see 3:1–6). God's only command to Adam and Eve is not to eat from this tree (see 2:16–17). Eve gives the fruit to Adam, and he also eats it. They disobey God and commit the first sin. They lose their trust in God and his goodness. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes the limits human beings have as creatures. We must recognize those limits and accept them with trust. If we try to exceed those limits, we are in a sense setting ourselves against God, or at least we aren't believing God's Word about what our limits are. This is Adam and Eve's sin, which is sometimes simply called **the Fall**.

Adam and Eve's sin has immediate consequences. They know the shame of having disobeyed God and try to cover it up with makeshift clothing and by hiding from God in the Garden. They start the blame game: Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. God announces further consequences. Childbirth will be a painful experience. The relationship between men and women will be filled with tension and marked by domination (see 3:16). The earth will no longer freely give its bounty, so human beings will have to

work hard at tilling the soil for their food (see 3:17–19). And finally, Adam and Eve and all their descendants will experience death, for "you are dust, / and to dust you shall return" (3:19).

Thus Adam and Eve's sin has consequences, not just for themselves but for all their descendants, which means all of us! The harmony that should exist between people, the harmony that should exist between human beings and nature, and the

harmony that should exist between people and God has been wounded. The Church explains the impact of Adam and Eve's sin in its teaching on Original Sin. Much of the Old Testament shows the continuing influence of sin, starting with the story of Cain killing Abel.

Original Sin

Original Sin is the name for the fact that “Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice” (*CCC*, 417). The Church doesn't attempt to explain how this happens. We accept it as a mystery that we cannot fully understand. What we know is that Adam and Eve did not receive their state of original holiness for themselves alone but for all human nature. Thus when they sinned their sin didn't affect just themselves but affected their human nature, which was passed on to all their descendants.

Perhaps this analogy will help you understand. If for some reason a genetic abnormality is part of a person's DNA—such as nearsightedness—it may get passed on to the person's children. The children didn't do anything to deserve this physical defect, but they still receive it. In a similar way, a spiritual defect was created in Adam and Eve's spiritual nature that now gets passed on to every human being (with two exceptions: Jesus and his Mother, Mary). We didn't do anything to be in this state—we were born into the state of Original Sin before we ever had a chance to commit a personal sin ourselves!

Original Sin does not cause us to lose our goodness or make us completely spiritually corrupt. Some of the Protestant reformers did teach that Original Sin had completely perverted human nature and destroyed our freedom to choose right and wrong, and some Protestant

Catholic Wisdom

Limbo

From about the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, some theologians used the word *limbo*, from a Latin word meaning “border” or “edge,” to name the destiny of unbaptized infants and children. This arose out of an understanding that Baptism is necessary for salvation (see John 3:5) but that God would not condemn an infant to Hell just because she or he died before being baptized. Limbo was described as a state or place of natural happiness without the enjoyment of God's presence.

Limbo was never officially a part of the Church's Tradition, and in recent times we have quit referring to it. The *Catechism* contains no mention of it at all. Rather the Church focuses on the simple truth that Christ died for all and that those who do not know the Gospel but who honestly seek God and his truth can be saved. So the funeral rites for an unbaptized child entrust the child to God's mercy and ask that God “grant him / her a place in your kingdom of peace.” For the child's parents, we pray: “Give them courage and help them in their pain and grief. May they all meet one day in the joy and peace of your kingdom” (*Order of Christian Funerals*).

Christians today still hold that belief. In response the Catholic Church more clearly articulated its teaching on God's Revelation. Original Sin does not completely pervert human goodness, but it does weaken our natural powers for relating to God and for choosing to do good. The effect of Original Sin is that

we are more influenced by ignorance, suffering, and the knowledge of our own death. We are more inclined to sin, an inclination that in the history of the Church is called **concupiscence**.

The doctrine of Original Sin is behind another important concept in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The concept is this: that since the Fall of Adam and Eve, the human race has been involved in a spiritual battle between good and evil. On one side of this battle, the evil one, Satan, continues to tempt human beings to reject God and God's laws. Because of Original Sin, we often give in to this temptation, leading to all kinds of evil, sin, and suffering. On the other side of the battle are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God has promised to help us win this battle against evil. In fact, Jesus Christ's life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension have already won the battle, and we just have to decide whose side we are going to be on!

Scripture Connection

You Formed My Inmost Being

God is love; this is a sacred truth. Read Psalm 139. This psalm is a beautiful and powerful reflection on human nature and our relationship with God. At one point the psalm declares, "In your book were written / all the days that were formed for me, / when none of them as yet existed" (verse 16). How do you think the person who wrote the psalm would answer these questions?

- How well does God know the beings he has created?
- What should our relationship with God be like?
- What is each person's purpose in life?

Reflect

How are you tempted to make bad choices? When do you feel like Saint Paul when he says: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19)?

Destined for Glory

The story of Adam and Eve raises some difficult questions. Why didn't God keep Adam and Eve from temptation? Why did one single act have such tremendous consequences? Why did God give us such power in the first place?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Sometimes the truth is hard. The truth in this story is that God gave the human race a tremendous gift, the freedom to choose our own destiny. It was only in giving us this gift that God could create beings in his own likeness who could freely choose to receive love and to give love in return. When this gift is used as God hoped it would be, it makes for harmony, joy, creativity, and deep, abiding love relationships. When this gift is used selfishly, it causes disharmony, despair, rigidity, and hate.

But the wonderful news is that God's love is so much greater than our weakness! God has destined us for glory, and his will cannot be stopped by our sin. The great saints understood that God permits sin, but then he brings forth an even

Saintly Profiles

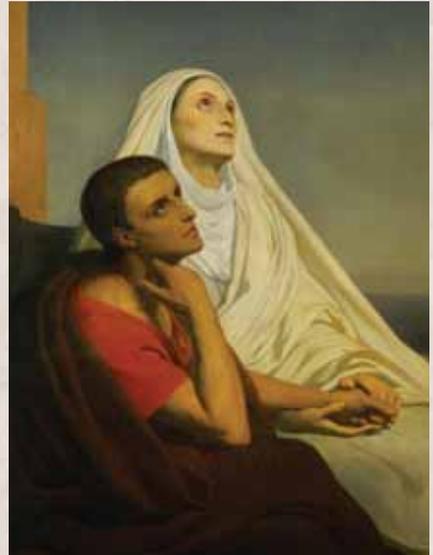
Saint Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430)

Augustine of Hippo is one of the most significant figures in the history of Western Christianity. The influence of his many books, sermons, and letters can be found on virtually every Christian doctrine, particularly the theology of Original Sin. But Augustine was not a plaster saint who wrote from an ivory tower.

Saint Augustine was born in Tagaste, North Africa, the son of a successful businessman and an ardent Christian mother, Monica. As a youth he was a brilliant student who found the Bible dull and preferred the pursuit of other philosophies. Augustine had an appetite for pleasure, pride, sensuality, and wisdom that led him to Rome in AD 383. He was followed by his widowed mother, who never tired of praying over his many sins—including that of living for many years with his mistress.

In Rome, despite his fame as a teacher and speaker, Augustine was tormented by depression. At his mother's advice, he sought the counsel of Bishop Ambrose of Milan. Through the bishop's teaching, Augustine began to realize that his anxious pursuit of pleasure and quest for wisdom were at their root a disordered quest for God.

After a long delay, Augustine was baptized by Ambrose in AD 387. He quickly became a priest, a bishop, and a defender of the faith. His classic autobiography, *Confessions*, is an account of his struggle with good and evil, his conversion, and his testimony to the power of grace. His feast day is August 28.



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greater good from the results of the sin. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. Through the horrible sin that resulted in Christ's suffering and death, God turned Adam and Eve's sin into a glorious victory. Jesus Christ has become the new Adam, who rose above temptation to conquer the effects of Original Sin once and for all. And we are invited to join him in his glory.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35–39)

Review Questions

1. Describe three things the first Creation account in Genesis tells us about God's plan for human beings.
2. Define the word *soul*.
3. What is stewardship, and how does it relate to the Creation accounts in the Book of Genesis?
4. How does the second account of Creation in Genesis differ from the first, and what additional things does it teach us?
5. What are the consequences of Original Sin?
6. How does God assist man in overcoming the effects of Original Sin?
7. What gift did God give the human race at Creation and why? What are some results of using this gift as God intended, and what are some results of using it selfishly?



7 The Promise of a Messiah

The foundation of a true marriage is the husband's and wife's vows to each other, vows that express a commitment to life-long, faithful love. When a husband or wife has been unfaithful, these vows are broken at a fundamental level. Restoring the marriage relationship is a very difficult process, even if the spouse who committed adultery is repentant and the faithful spouse is willing to forgive. For this very reason, several of the prophets expressed humanity's relationship with God as a marriage in which God has been faithful but his Chosen People have committed adultery. On our own we could not overcome this break in our relationship with God; it is only because of God's great love and saving actions that our relationship has been restored.

Given human's long history of breaking the covenant with God, you might think that God would just give up on us. But God's love, patience, and understanding have no human limits. After Adam and Eve's Fall from Grace, God seeks to restore to humanity what was lost in the Fall. In this chapter we look at God's first promise to Adam and Eve, the Covenants he made with his Chosen People in the Old Testament, and

FAQ

- Why did God make all those covenants with his Chosen People in the Old Testament?
- What are messianic prophecies?

Words to Look For

- *Ark of the Covenant*
- *literal sense*
- *spiritual sense*
- *Paschal Mystery*
- *polytheism*
- *circumcision*
- *theophany*
- *Torah*
- *messiah*

the prophets' promises of a Savior. Understanding these things will prepare us to more fully understand the wonderful fulfillment of God's plan in the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ.

Did You Know?

The Ark of the Covenant

The **Ark of the Covenant** is described in Exodus 25:10–22. It was constructed of precious wood and metal to emphasize its sacred purpose. The tablets containing the Covenant Commandments were kept in it. At the top of the Ark, gold statues of two cherubim (angels who serve God) were placed with their wings creating a seat. The Ark was shaped like a throne because it was considered the seat of God Almighty, King Forever.

God commanded the Israelites to build the Ark during their stay at Mount Sinai. As they wandered in the desert, the Ark traveled with them and was kept in the tabernacle, a special tent constructed for the worship of God. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the Ark was kept at various holy shrines until David brought it to Jerusalem. After Solomon built the Temple, the Ark was kept in its innermost room, called the Holy of Holies. The Israelites believed this was God's earthly dwelling place. After the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, the Ark was lost or destroyed.

God's Promise to Adam and Eve

After the Fall things seem pretty bleak for the human race. We have already seen the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin described (see Genesis, chapter 3). Adam and Eve, who are symbolic of all humanity now, have lost God's gifts of original holiness and justice. Their relationships with God, with each other, and with all creation are more difficult and challenging. But hidden in the third chapter of Genesis is a great spiritual truth: even amidst the greatest of tragedies, God does not abandon us. For those who have faith, God will bring good even from sin and suffering.

The Protoevangelium

When God explains the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience, he says this to the serpent:

I will put enmity between you and
the woman,
and between your offspring and
hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.
(Genesis 3:15)

This verse is called the *Protoevangelium*, which is a Latin word meaning "first gospel." The **literal sense** of this verse is that it explains why snakes and people do not get along very well. But after Christ's life, death, and Resurrection, the Church Fathers saw a deeper, **spiritual sense** in this verse. They interpreted it as God's first promise to send a Savior to

Literal Sign	Spiritual Meaning
the serpent	Satan
the woman	Mary
the woman’s offspring	Jesus Christ
enmity between the serpent and the woman, between the serpent and her offspring	the spiritual battle between Satan and God for the future of humanity
God’s words to the serpent: “He will strike your head, / and you will strike at his heel” (Genesis 3:15).	Jesus Christ will win the battle with Satan. A strike at the heel is a position of weakness, but a strike at the head is a death blow.

free humanity from the effects of the Fall. The chart above will help you understand their interpretation.

So even as Adam and Eve are leaving the Garden of Eden, God is already making a promise, a covenant, that he will save humanity from the damage caused by Satan’s deception. In this deeper understanding, Mary is the new Eve and Christ is the new Adam. They will restore humanity’s original holiness and justice that was lost by Adam and Eve. As the Mother of God, Mary is the first to benefit from Christ’s victory over sin. She is conceived without the stain of Original Sin, and with special grace from God, she remains free from sin throughout her entire life.

The Old Testament Covenants

Among the nations surrounding ancient Israel, covenants were usually made between two kings, outlining the responsibilities the kings had toward each other. Often the stronger king promised to protect the weaker king, and the weaker king promised to pay tribute or taxes to the more powerful king. But we do not have any records of these kingdoms’ having covenants with their gods or goddesses. In

Scripture Connection

Covenant Warnings and Blessings

The Book of Deuteronomy portrays Moses presenting his final summary of the Israelites’ Covenant with God. The people are just outside of the Promised Land, waiting to enter. Moses takes the opportunity to review the events leading up to this moment, to review the Ten Commandments and the Law that will govern the people once they enter the Promised Land, to give a final warning about the dangers of disobeying the Law, and to give his final blessing. Read chapter 30. What does the chapter say are the rewards for obeying God’s Law? What does it mean when it says that God’s commandment (Law) “is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us that we may hear it and observe it?’ . . . No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe” (verses 11–12,14)?

their mythology, their deities would never humble themselves to enter into a binding agreement with human beings.

This makes Israel unique. Their covenants are not with other kingdoms but with God. God initiates these covenants and stays faithful to them. Through them he communicates the love he has for humanity and his desire to restore our communion with him. These covenants point us to the **Paschal Mystery**, the redemption of all humanity through Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We will look at four of these covenants—those with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.

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At Mount Sinai, God initiates a Covenant with the entire Israelite race. This Covenant prepares the way for the New Covenant, which is fulfilled through the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

The Covenant with Noah

The Covenant God made with Noah to never again send a flood to kill all life on earth occurs in Genesis 9:8–17. The sign of this Covenant is the rainbow. God says, “When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (9:14–15).

One important thing to consider about this Covenant is its universal nature. Directly after God makes this Covenant, chapter 10 of Genesis gives a description of how Noah's descendants multiplied to become all the nations of the world: “These are the families of Noah's sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood” (verse 32). This was a way of saying that God's Covenant with Noah now extended to all the nations of the earth and will remain in force as long as the world lasts.

However, because of sin these nations are always in danger of **polytheism**, which is the false belief in many gods. They are also always in danger of worshipping their nation and their king instead of God, which is another form of idolatry. Yet the Covenant with Noah assures us that God is still at work among these nations. It will find its fulfillment in the New Covenant that Jesus Christ extends to all the people of the world.

The Abrahamic Covenant

In chapter 12 of Genesis, the story of Abraham begins. Starting with Abraham, God begins a new phase of his plan to restore humanity's holiness and justice. He does this by calling a Chosen People to be in a unique relationship with him. These people will have a special role in his plan. God establishes this special relationship and its purpose in the Covenant he makes with Abraham. Genesis contains several occasions where God announces his Covenant to Abraham: 12:1–3, 13:14–17, 15:1–19, and 17:1–27. But the later announcements are, for the most part, further elaborations on the Covenant first made in chapter 12: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Saintly Profiles

Moses (approximately 1300 BC)

Moses is, without a doubt, one of the most important characters in the Old Testament. Struggling to find language to describe his greatness, Deuteronomy 34:10 says, “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” Born to a couple from the Tribe of Levi and raised as an Egyptian by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was perfectly suited to negotiate Israel's freedom from slavery in Egypt. In event after event, the author of Exodus shows us Moses' wonder-working power, his prophetic skill, and his intimacy with God.

Despite all Moses was able to accomplish through the power of God, he never lost his humanness. He lacked confidence in his ability to speak (see Exodus 4:10), he felt angry and frustrated with his people (see 17:4), and he bargained with God out of love for his people (see 32:11–14). Moses, noble but also knowing sadness, is elegantly portrayed in the passage where he dies within sight of the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy, chapter 34). These qualities paint a picture of someone whose perseverance and trust allowed God to work through him.

A prophet is literally God's voice, and Moses was indeed God's voice, which shaped Israel to be a people of the Covenant. Most other leaders and figures in the Old Testament are compared with Moses. In the New Testament, Jesus is revealed as the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, completing the work God began through Moses.



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In his Covenant with Abraham, God promises Abraham three things: (1) to make of him a great nation by promising Abraham many descendants, (2) to provide Abraham and his descendants a land of their own, and (3) to make Abraham and his descendants a blessing for all the nations.

The third promise is the most important one in God's saving plan. The first two promises are the necessary preconditions in order for the third promise to be fulfilled. God's plan is for Abraham's descendants, who will later be called Hebrews, Israelites, and finally Jews, to be an example to all other people of how to live in right relationship with the one,

true God. God asks Abraham and his descendants to commit to these things: (1) to walk with God—that is, to recognize the one, true God (see Genesis 17:1); (2) to be blameless—that is to live a life without sin (see 17:1); and (3) to practice **circumcision** as a physical mark of the covenant (see 17:9–14).

God's Covenant with Abraham prepares the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in whom the Covenant is fulfilled. Through Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham, God's blessing is brought to all the nations.

Reflect

Today God wants the Church to be a blessing for all people, just as he wanted Abraham's descendants to be a blessing for all the nations. Think of your own local parish. How do the people of your parish bring God's blessing to people who are not part of your parish family? How do you bring God's blessing to them?

The Mosaic Covenant

One of the most awe-inspiring events in the Old Testament is the **theophany** at Mount Sinai, described in Exodus 19:16–25. The Israelites have escaped from Egypt because of God's miraculous intervention and have been journeying for three months. They have come to the Sinai Desert and are camped at the base of a large mountain. On the third day after their



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This painting depicts the fulfillment of God's Kingdom of peace, as described in Isaiah 11:6–9. How do you imagine the fulfillment of God's Kingdom?

arrival at the mountain, the air is filled with lightning and thunder, the ground shakes (an earthquake?), and smoke and fire appear on the mountaintop (a volcano?). These dramatic signs of God's presence are meant to call attention to the critical importance of what comes next.

God summons Moses to the mountaintop and renews with Moses the Covenant he made with Abraham. And he gives Moses a set of laws that the Israelites must follow as their part of the Covenant. This Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1–17), but the full Law is spelled out in the rest of Exodus and Leviticus. It is summarized again in Deuteronomy. This Law is also called the Mosaic Law or the Old Law. It is old not in the sense of being obsolete, but in the sense that it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is the New Law.

From this point on, the Covenant and the Law are so closely linked that they are understood to be two sides of the same coin. Keeping the Law is the most important sign of faithfulness to the Covenant. Breaking the Law is the same as being unfaithful to the Covenant. The Jewish people eventually call the first five books of their Scripture—the same five books that begin the Old Testament—the **Torah**, which is the Hebrew word for “law” or “teaching.” Through these laws, God teaches his Chosen People how to be in right relationship with him and with one another. The Old Law is a step in God's plan for restoring our original holiness and justice. Our redemption in Christ, which is the fulfillment of God's plan, exceeds original holiness and justice. It will become the rule by which the prophets will measure the faithfulness of the kings and the people. Failure to keep the Law will bring about God's anger and unpleasant consequences, which are just, according to the Law that God has given his people.

Live It

What Would the Prophets Tell Us?

The prophets of the Old Testament often cried out against the hypocrisy of the Israelites. They pointed out the great gap between the demands of the Covenant (being faithful to God, practicing justice, caring for the poor and needy) and how the Israelites were actually living. For example, Amos tells the people that their worship means nothing to God because they are not living good and just lives. Their prayers have become empty and hollow. Only when they “let justice roll down like waters, / and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24) will their worship have any meaning again. Today the words of the prophets remind us to be faithful to the teachings of Christ by becoming peacemakers, caring for the poor, and loving those whom we do not like. They remind us that our worship on Sunday is most authentic when we are faithful to Christ's teachings. What might an Old Testament prophet say to the people in your parish or city?

The Davidic Covenant

There is one more promise God makes in the Old Testament that can also be called a covenant. This promise is delivered to King David by the prophet Nathan. David wishes to build a permanent dwelling for the **Ark of the Covenant**, the sacred box in which the tablets with the Ten Commandments are kept. God instructs Nathan (see 2 Samuel 7:4–17) to tell David not to build this Temple. Instead David's heir will build it. Through Nathan, God promises David that "your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever" (verse 16).

In this context a "house" means a bloodline or direct line of descendants. Even though a descendant of David was always ruler of Israel or Judah (the southern kingdom), the kingdom itself was destroyed in 587 BC. After this there were no more Davidic kings. But the Gospels help us understand how God's promise to David was fulfilled. Jesus Christ was a direct descendant of David (see Matthew 1:6, Luke 3:31). Christ established the Kingdom of God, which will endure forever and over which he reigns for eternity. Through him the Davidic Covenant is fulfilled.

Prophecies of a Messiah

All the Old Testament Covenants are part of God's plan. They assure us of God's loving commitment to humanity. They teach us how to live in right relationship with God and with one another. They point us

toward the restoration of our original holiness and justice. But these Covenants by themselves are not enough to bring God's plan of salvation to fulfillment; they point the way to something more. That something more is revealed in the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

Catholic Wisdom

We Gained More Than We Lost

Saint Leo the Great served as Pope from 440 to 461. Leo protected the Church from a number of heresies. He was a great theologian and homilist, and in 1754 was declared a Doctor of the Church. Leo expressed the wonder and joy of the great mystery of God's plan of salvation in one of his sermons:

For today not only are we confirmed as possessors of paradise, but have also in Christ penetrated the heights of heaven, and have gained still greater things through Christ's unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil's malice. For us, whom our virulent enemy had driven out from the bliss of our first abode, the Son of God has made members of Himself and placed at the right hand of the Father, with Whom He lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen. (Sermon 73)

We have already learned how the prophets spoke their message of warning and condemnation when the Chosen People broke their Covenant with God. But the prophets were also God’s instruments of hope to his Chosen People. This was especially true after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC and the Israelites’ Exile in Babylon. During this time God revealed to the prophets a vision of a New Covenant and a new heavenly Kingdom. This would be brought about through the work of a **messiah**, which literally means “anointed one.”

By proclaiming this vision, the prophets gave the Chosen People hope for a future in which humanity’s relationship with God would be fully restored. In the centuries preceding the birth of Christ, many faithful Jews waited in expectant hope for this promised Messiah who would deliver them from their earthly and spiritual bondage. Their wait was over when Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He would bring these ancient Covenants to their final and complete fulfillment.

Reflect

All the prophecies of hope listed in the following chart tell us something about Jesus. The chart illustrates how different Old Testament prophecies prefigured different aspects of Jesus and his coming, and what God accomplished through him. Prophecies about Christ are one of the clearest ways the Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament and helps us to see that all of the Old Testament is “a path to Jesus Christ” (*Verbum Domini*, 38). The discernment of God’s work in the Old Testament as a prefiguration of what he accomplished through

Pray It!

O Happy Fault!

Can good come out of evil? During the Easter Vigil, the deacon (or a cantor) sings a hymn called the Exsultet, which includes the following:

This is the night,
when Christ broke the prison-
bars of death
and rose victorious from the
underworld.
Our birth would have been no
gain,
had we not been redeemed.
O wonder of your humble care
for us!
O love, O charity beyond all
telling,
to ransom a slave you gave
away your Son!
O truly necessary sin of
Adam,
destroyed completely by the
Death of Christ!
O happy fault
that earned so great, so
glorious a Redeemer!

(*Roman Missal*)

To understand what is meant by the phrase “Happy fault,” we can look to the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who points out how God can derive a greater good from an evil action. The Exsultet reminds us of this: “so glorious a Redeemer” was sent to raise us up because of the “sin of Adam.” That is, because of Original Sin, God sent his Son into the world for our salvation. (Although God can and does derive good from evil, evil itself never becomes a good.)

As you pray this prayer, thank God for his love and forgiveness and for sending his Son to conquer sin and death.

Jesus Christ is called typology. Typology illuminates the unity of God’s plan in the two Testaments.

Consider the prophecies listed in the chart. Which prophecy speaks to you most strongly about the coming of Jesus Christ? Which one fills you with the most hope?

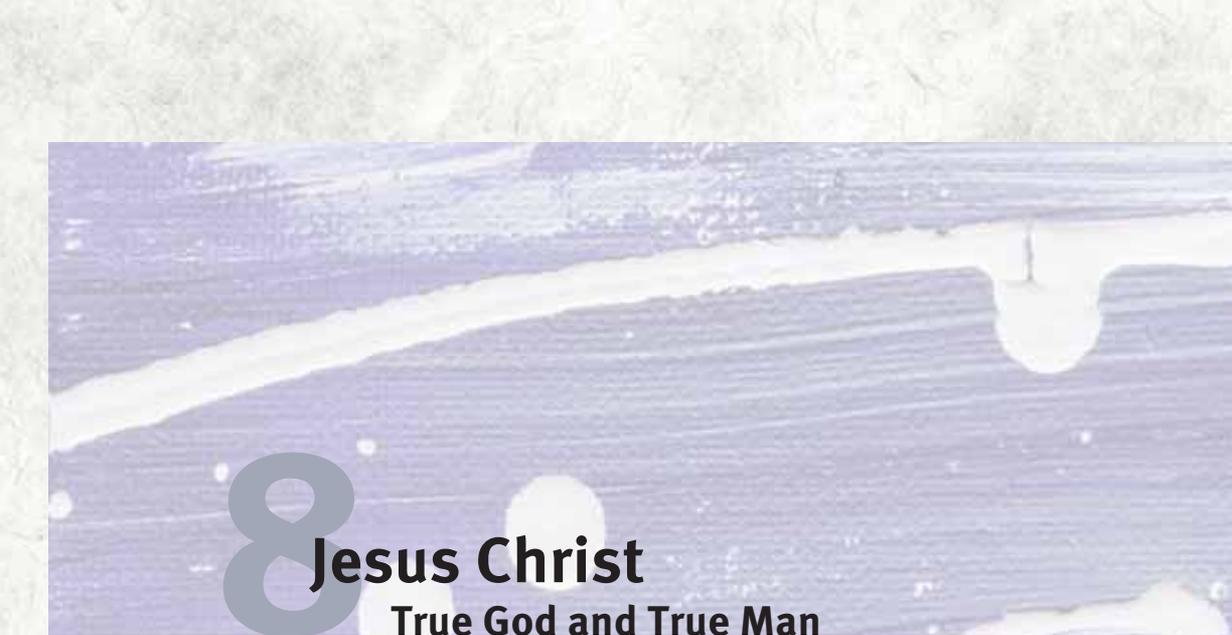
Some Important Prophecies of Hope

Location	Description	Connection to Christ
Isaiah 9:1–6	Isaiah prophesies that the “people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” A child will be born to lead them and among his names will be God-Hero and Prince of Peace. His kingdom will be just and peaceful forever.	Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and the Son of God who forever rules the Kingdom of Heaven.
Isaiah 11:1–9	Isaiah prophesies about a coming ruler from the “stump of Jesse.” “With righteousness he shall judge the poor” and “with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.” Even natural enemies will play together peacefully in his kingdom.	Jesus Christ is a descendant of Jesse (David’s father).
Isaiah 52:13—53:12	This is one of the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah. Isaiah prophesies of a servant of the Lord who is “stricken for the transgression of [God’s] people.” “The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” and “by his bruises we are healed.”	This prophecy is an accurate description of Christ’s Passion. He suffered and died for our salvation.
Jeremiah 31:31–34	Jeremiah prophesies about a New Covenant God will make with Israel and Judah: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”	The New Covenant is established in Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives in every believer’s heart.

Ezekiel 34:11–31	Ezekiel prophesies that God will act like a good shepherd, rescuing his people, giving them safe pasture, and healing their injuries. He will “make with them a covenant of peace” and “save them from the hands of those who enslaved them.”	In the Gospel of John, Christ declares that he is the Good Shepherd.
Ezekiel 37:1–14	Ezekiel has a vision of a valley of dry bones being resurrected and coming alive again. “I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.”	With the coming of the New Covenant, all the faithful who have died will rise again, having been saved through the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Zechariah 9:9–10	Zechariah prophesies about a victorious king. He shall “command peace to the nations” and “his dominion shall be from sea to sea.”	Jesus Christ is the promised King and just Savior.

Review Questions

1. Describe the significance of the *Protoevangelium*.
2. What is the significance of God’s covenant with Noah?
3. What three things did God promise in his covenant with Abraham?
4. What is the relationship between the covenant and the Law established by the Mosaic Covenant?
5. Why did it look like God’s covenant with David would go unfulfilled? How was it fulfilled?
6. Define *messiah*.
7. Describe two messianic prophecies from the Old Testament and how they were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.



8 Jesus Christ

True God and True Man

Consider these song titles from both Christian and secular music: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “The Wind Beneath My Wings,” “Jesus Is the Rock and He Rolled My Sins Away!” and “One of Us.” Two of these songs are obviously about Jesus, but the other two could also describe him. Taken together these songs describe several things about Jesus: he is our friend, he encourages us to be our best, he saves us from our sins, and he is God who took on human nature for our sake. From song titles alone, it is clear that Jesus means many things to many people.

The Catholic faith is centered on Jesus Christ. Everything we believe has been revealed in him or through him. You will find that every chapter in this handbook mentions him. Many people have devoted their entire life to studying Jesus and all he means. The Gospel of John puts it this way: “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (21:25).

FAQ

- What does the name Jesus Christ mean?
- How do I know that Jesus is both true God and true man?
- What is the Immaculate Conception?

Words to Look For

- *Gospel*
- *Yahweh*
- *Annunciation*
- *canon*
- *Incarnation*
- *Immaculate*
- *evangelist*
- *Theotokos*
- *Conception*
- *Son of God*

In this chapter we look at some basic things the Church teaches about Jesus. We investigate what kind of literature the Gospels are and why we have four Gospels instead of just one. We look at some of the titles used to describe Jesus, to see what they can teach us about him. And we learn about the Incarnation, the belief that Jesus is both true God and true man.

The Gospels: Faith Portraits of Jesus

Let's be perfectly clear; the best way to learn about Jesus is to spend time reading the Gospels yourself. The Catholic Church strongly encourages its members to read the Bible—particularly the Gospels. Saint Jerome once said: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." The **Gospels** are the written accounts of Jesus' life that were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Reading them is an important way for us to personally meet Jesus and to understand his message and his life. This section explains what the Gospels are and what to look for when you read them.

People have some common misconceptions about the four Gospels. Some people think they were written soon after Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection. They were not. The first Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, was probably written thirty to forty years after Jesus Christ's death and Resurrection. The last Gospel to be written, the Gospel of John, was probably written sixty or seventy years after Jesus' death and Resurrection.

Some people think the Gospels are simple biographies of Jesus' life and are historically accurate in every detail. But by comparing the same stories in different Gospels, we can see that this is also a mistaken belief.

Did You Know?

The Development of the Gospels

The Gospels are the inspired Word of God, but they did not fall from the sky in their current form. A process of development took place in four stages among the followers of Jesus:

1. **Appearing in person** During the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, people experienced the message of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' words and actions.
2. **Proclaiming the Good News** With the Resurrection came enlightened understanding of what Jesus has said and done. The disciples told the stories of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. They followed his command to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). As they did this, collections of stories and sayings of Jesus' began to take shape.
3. **Writing it down** The collections were edited and shaped by the writers we know as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each one was inspired to organize the Good News (Gospel) in a form that best spoke to their different communities.
4. **Authorizing the list** Some writings, such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter, were not accepted into the canon of the New Testament because they did not accurately represent the life of Jesus according to the Tradition of the Church. The **canon** is the official list of books of the Bible accepted by the Church. The canon of twenty-seven books of the New Testament was established by the end of the fourth century.

For example, Jesus' cleansing of the Temple takes place toward the end of the Gospel of Matthew (see 21:12–17), but it happens at the beginning of the Gospel of John (see 2:13–16). Here's another famous example: in Matthew Jesus delivers his first great speech from a mountain (see 5:1), but in Luke Jesus delivers the same speech from a plain (see 6:17).

Scripture Connection

The Gospel of Mark

If you have never done so, consider reading one of the Gospels from beginning to end. You might start with the Gospel of Mark. It is short and filled with action. You can read it in a couple of hours. Before you start, ask the Holy Spirit to be with you. When you have finished, spend some time quietly meditating on what you have read. Reading a Gospel like this makes us face some questions: Do I believe that what I have just read is true? Is Jesus really the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Your relationship with Jesus will be determined by your answers to these questions!

These differences may surprise you. But remember that God reveals in the Bible what we need to know for our salvation. Historical, geographical, or even scientific accuracy isn't necessary for our salvation. Let's examine this from another perspective. Have you ever wondered why there are four Gospels instead of just one? It isn't because each Gospel covers a different aspect of Jesus' life. In fact, almost all the Gospel of Mark is repeated in Matthew and Luke.

The reason we have four Gospels is because the four authors, also called **evangelists**, were members of different communities, facing different concerns and challenges. The Holy Spirit guided these communities in understanding and applying the stories and teachings about Jesus to their situations. So sometimes they used the same stories, but told them in slightly different ways to emphasize a religious truth revealed in Jesus' life and teaching that was needed for their community.

For example, Matthew's Gospel was probably written for a community with a lot of Jewish converts to Christianity. So the author emphasizes how Jesus was the fulfillment of the expectations and prophecies of the Jewish Scripture (which Christians call the Old Testament). Thus in Matthew Jesus delivers his first great speech—the message of the New Covenant—from a mountain. Because in Exodus 19:16–25, God communicated the Old Covenant from a mountain, the Jewish people Matthew was addressing would immediately understand that Jesus was much like Moses, offering a new covenant to them.

The Gospels are faith portraits of Jesus, not historical biographies. When they wrote the Gospels, the authors told

their stories about Jesus in a way that emphasized the religious truths their communities had learned through the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we need all four Gospels to understand the whole truth about Jesus. But don't worry about getting confused about the essentials. The religious truths found in the four Gospels never contradict one another—even if the historical details don't always match.

Reflect

To see how the Gospel authors treated the same material in slightly different ways, compare the two versions of the Beatitudes in the Bible, found in Matthew 5:3–12 and Luke 6:20–26. How are they the same? How are they different? What do you think the sacred author of each version was trying to emphasize?

Saintly Profiles

Saint Peter (First Century AD)

Simon Peter came from obscurity to become one of our greatest saints and our first Pope. He came from the village of Bethsaida, in the outback region of Galilee. He and his brother Andrew were humble fishermen when Jesus called them. We know Peter was married because of the miracle in which Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (see Matthew 8:14, 1 Corinthians 9:5).

Because Peter is an Apostle, it is surprising to discover that he often just doesn't get it. He and the other disciples misunderstand Jesus' teachings and mission, forcing Jesus to explain them (see Mark 4:10). He objects to Jesus going to Jerusalem to die, and Jesus sharply rebukes him, saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23). To his shame Peter denies Jesus three times after Jesus' arrest (see Luke 22:54–62).

But Peter's weaknesses are transformed through his faith in Christ. Peter was the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and receives "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:16–19). After the Resurrection Jesus commissions Peter to shepherd his flock of believers (see John 21:15–17). The Book of the Acts of the Apostles shows us Peter as the Church's first dynamic leader. Saint Peter shows that if we are open to the Holy Spirit, we will do great things—despite our weaknesses and mistakes! Saint Peter and Saint Paul share the same feast day, June 29.



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Titles of Jesus in the Bible

In the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel tells Mary, “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus” (1:31). *Jesus* means “God saves” in

Hebrew. Jesus’ very name reflects his identity and his mission as savior of the world. It is through Jesus, and Jesus alone, that we are saved from our sins, which is why God “gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (adapted from Philippians 2:9–10).

“Christ” is not Jesus’ last name, even though it sounds like we use it that way. It

is a formal title for Jesus that is used more than four hundred times in the New Testament. *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *messiah*, which means “anointed.” To be anointed in the religious sense is to have oil placed on you in preparation for a special mission. In the Old Testament, kings and sometimes prophets were anointed in God’s name. After their kingdom collapsed, many Jews believed that God would send a new anointed one, the Messiah (or Christ), who would fulfill all God’s promises for salvation. Peter was the first to proclaim about Jesus, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29), announcing that Jesus was the Savior the Jews had been hoping for. So when you say “Jesus Christ,” what you are really saying is “Jesus, the anointed one sent by God to be the Savior of the world.”

Another title frequently used for Jesus is **Son of God**. In the Old Testament, the title “son of God” is sometimes used for angels, for the people of Israel, and for Israel’s kings. The title signifies their special relationship with God. But when it is applied to Jesus in the New Testament, it takes on additional meaning. We are all children of God, but Jesus has a unique relationship with God the Father. At both Jesus’ Baptism and his Transfiguration, the Father’s voice announces, “This is my Son, the Beloved” (Matthew 3:17, 17:5). Jesus is the only true, eternal Son of the Father, and he is one of the three Persons of the Trinity, fully God himself.

Finally, Jesus is frequently referred to as Lord in the New Testament. *Lord* was a title of respect in Jesus’ time, and fre-



This painting from Iran of the Nativity does not contain images of angels or the star of Bethlehem. Why do some paintings emphasize the human nature of Jesus’ birth and other paintings emphasize his divine nature?

quently people who were approaching Jesus called him Lord. But the word had another, unique meaning. *Lord* is the Greek word they used instead of *Yahweh*, the Hebrew name often used for God in the Old Testament. *Yahweh* was considered too sacred to be pronounced out loud, so the Jews came to use the name *Lord* to refer to God. When the Apostle Thomas calls Jesus “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28), he is calling Jesus by a title the Jews used for God. Today, whenever we call Jesus Lord, we recognize his divinity and acknowledge that he alone is worthy of our worship and our complete obedience.

Reflect

Other titles have been used for Jesus besides those mentioned in this chapter. Some of these titles are Emmanuel (see Matthew 1:23), Suffering Servant (see Isaiah 53:11), the Alpha and the Omega (see Revelation 1:8), and the Good Shepherd (see John 10:11). You may wish to look up the Bible passages associated with these titles to learn more about Jesus.

The Incarnation: True God and True Man

When we consider the titles used for Jesus in the Bible, we are led to an inescapable conclusion: that the authors of the Gospels came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was fully God. But does that mean that he wasn't fully man? Absolutely not! Jesus had a human nature just as we do. He laughed, he wept, he felt joy, he experienced temptation, and he felt pain. He had a human body and human will and intellect, thus he could grow “in wisdom and in years” (Luke 2:52). But he also had a divine intellect and will. “He is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother” (CCC, 469).

Live,
It

Who Is Jesus for You?

What kind of a relationship do you have with Jesus? Even if you find it difficult to answer this question, there are things you can do right now to strengthen your relationship with him. Here are some suggestions:

1. Be patient. Just walk with the question for a while.
2. Make it personal. Think of it as getting to know a new friend. Talk to Jesus. Introduce yourself—he wants to hear from you! Let him know your questions about him. Tell him your doubts and dreams, your fears, and what you are thankful for in life.
3. Investigate. Read about Jesus in Scripture. Imagine yourself there with Jesus and what he says to you. Ask a grandparent, an uncle or an aunt, a parent or a friend about how he or she has gotten to know Jesus better.
4. Reach out and see the face of Jesus in someone in need (see Matthew 25:31–46).

The mystery of the union of Jesus' divine and human natures in one Divine Person is called the **Incarnation**. Like the Trinity, the Incarnation is a mystery we will never be able fully to understand. But we do know that at the time appointed by God, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, became incarnate. That is, without losing his divine nature, he became fully man. This is expressed in the Nicene Creed when we say, "For us men

and for our salvation . . . he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

The common phrase used in Catholic teaching is that Jesus Christ is both "true God and true man." This may sound a little odd to our gender-sensitive modern ears, but the Church uses this phrasing to emphasize that the Word of God became fully human, and human beings are always male or female. The phrase "true man" isn't meant to make us focus on Jesus' masculinity as much as on his humanity.

Because in Jesus Christ the human and the divine are perfectly united, he is the perfect and only mediator between God and humanity. As the perfect mediator, Jesus reveals his Father to us: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). God is able to fully reveal his loving plan for us through Jesus. And in learning about Jesus, we understand more fully what God requires of us. In fact, God wants us to share in Christ's divinity! That doesn't mean that he wants to make us gods but that he wants us to become the image of God we were created to be. If we believe in Jesus Christ and give ourselves to him with our whole heart, mind, and soul, the Holy Spirit will help us become more fully the image of God, which is our ultimate destiny.

Pray It

The Jesus Prayer

The Jesus prayer is an ancient and still popular way to open yourself to a deeper relationship with Jesus. You simply pray these words:

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.**

The biblical roots of this prayer are in the story of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar who cries out to Jesus from the roadside, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:46–52), as well as the story of the tax collector who utters very similar words (see Luke 18:13).

Pray the Jesus prayer by sitting in a relaxing place, breathing in deeply, and as you slowly exhale, letting go of distractions and worries. Imagine yourself as Bartimaeus before Jesus. What do you ask of Jesus? Then slowly say the prayer over and over to the rhythm of your breathing. Pray the first phrase as you breathe in, the second as you exhale, and so on. Repeat the prayer throughout the day, and be aware of Jesus' presence in everything you do. Try it!

Reflect

When you hear the phrase “Jesus saves,” what does it mean to you? To someone who isn’t a believer, how would you describe what it means?

Mary, Mother of God

As the Church explored the mystery and meaning of Jesus’ life, the Holy Spirit also revealed a deeper understanding of the role played by his Mother, Mary. An earlier chapter discussed her position as the first disciple. Now let’s explore the meaning of another title given to Mary, *Theotokos*, a Greek word that literally means “Mother of God.”

The Old Testament contains many stories of holy women who, though society considered them to be weak and powerless, were chosen by God to be his instruments in fulfilling his covenant promises. Some of these women were Miriam, Sarah, Hannah, Ruth, Judith, and Esther. These holy women of Israel paved the way for the plan God had from eternity, that a woman from his Chosen People would be the mother of his Son. That plan was fulfilled in Mary, a simple young woman from the little-known village of Nazareth. When she said yes to the angel Gabriel, Mary freely gave herself to God’s plan to become the Mother of the eternal Son of God made man. Because Jesus is God himself, Mary is truly the Mother of God.

When Gabriel visited Mary to announce that she was chosen to bear God’s Son, an event called the **Annunciation**, the angel said to her, “Greetings, favored one!” (Luke 1:28). God truly favored Mary. This special favor is expressed in two important Catholic beliefs about Mary: her perpetual virginity and her Immaculate Conception.

Catholic Wisdom

Mistaken Identity: Heresies about Christ

In the first five centuries of the Church, major controversies arose about whether Jesus was both fully man and fully divine (true man and true God.) Following are some of the false teachings, called heresies, that were condemned:

Docetism claimed that Jesus is truly God but only appears in disguise as human. This teaching denied the full humanity of Jesus.

Arianism, on the other hand, denied that Jesus is fully God. Arius lived around the years AD 250–336 and taught that Jesus was a creature as we are and did not exist before he was conceived. Arius saw Jesus as greater than other humans but less than God.

Nestorianism held that the two natures of Jesus (his divinity and his humanity) were like two separate persons and were not fully united in the one person of Jesus Christ. For Nestorius and his followers, this also meant that Mary was the mother of the human Jesus but not the Mother of God.

Monophysitism said that Jesus had only one divine nature, because after the Incarnation, his human nature was absorbed into his divine nature.

Several important Church councils of bishops were called to correct these heresies. This resulted in some of the carefully defined language about Jesus Christ in the Nicene Creed.

In God's plan Jesus Christ was born of a virgin as a sign of Christ's divine nature. When Mary asked how she would give birth because she was a virgin, Gabriel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). Jesus' birth is a result of God's initiative. As a result Jesus has only God as Father. The virgin birth also symbolizes that Jesus is the new Adam (who also didn't have an earthly father) and will usher in the new Heaven and earth that is our ultimate destiny.

Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. Although the Bible mentions Jesus' brothers and sisters, it was common at the time for any close relative, such as a cousin, to be referred to in this way. Because Mary has no physical children other than Jesus, her spiritual motherhood extends to all of us who call Jesus brother.

God's special plan for Mary also meant that she was conceived without Original Sin. The formal name for this event is the **Immaculate Conception**. We say that Mary was in a perfect state of grace—that is, her relationship with God was not marred by sin from the first moment she came into being (her conception). Because she was without sin, she had perfect freedom to cooperate with God's plan for our salvation. And Mary remained without sin her entire life. The Church celebrates Mary's sinless life on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8).

Review Questions

1. What are the Gospels, and why are there four of them? Why is it important to read the Gospels?
2. Name the four Gospels, and list some of the differences between them.
3. What does the name Jesus mean?
4. What were three titles used for Jesus in the Bible, and what do they tell us about him?
5. Define the Incarnation.
6. What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is the perfect and only mediator between God and humanity?
7. Explain why the title Mother of God is appropriate for Mary.
8. List and explain two important truths about Mary.



Jesus' Message and Mission

Have you ever thought about what your mission in life might be—not just what profession you might like to work in but what your real purpose in life is? Maybe you haven't given it a lot of thought, but as you look toward graduation from high school and move on to work or more school or even volunteer service, it is something to which you will want to give some thought. Jesus had a clear understanding of his mission from an early age. And his mission will give you some clear direction about your purpose in life.

Jesus' Mission: Proclaim the Kingdom of God

All of Christ's life was part of God's saving plan, the mystery of our redemption. The Gospel of Luke tells a story about Jesus when he was twelve years old and became separated from his parents for three days (see Luke 2:41–52). Mary and Jesus' foster father, Joseph, finally find him talking with the teachers in the Temple in Jerusalem. When Mary begins to scold Jesus, he answers, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (2:49). Then he returns with Mary and Joseph and is

FAQ

- What happened to Jesus during his teens and twenties?
- Where is the Kingdom of God?
- Do miracles really happen?

Words to Look For

- *Kingdom of God*
- *Reign of God*
- *parable*
- *miracle*
- *disciple*
- *Apostles*

obedient to them. Luke implies that even as a youngster, Jesus was aware of his special relationship to God and of his mission.

Outside of this one story, we know very little about Jesus' life as a child, teenager, and young adult. The Church calls these years the hidden life of Jesus. Yet what we do know

about these years—that Jesus was obedient to his parents, that he participated in humble but honest work, that he grew in the knowledge of his religion—gives us an example of holiness lived out in daily life. Born without Original Sin and never committing a sin his entire life, Jesus was preparing for his mission even in these hidden years.

Jesus' public life begins with his Baptism by John the Baptist. Although Jesus had no need to be baptized because he was without sin (and John's Baptism was about turning away from sin), he still asked John to baptize him. In doing so Jesus identified himself with sinners and anticipated the moment when he would take upon himself the sin of all humankind. After his

Baptism Jesus immediately went out into the desert to fast and pray in preparation for his mission. During that time he rejected the Devil's temptations to achieve his mission through fame, comfort, or political power.

When Jesus returned from the desert, he was truly ready to begin his mission. Each Gospel has its own variation on how he announces his mission. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus begins by proclaiming the Good News of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent" (Mark 1:15). In Luke, Jesus reads a prophecy from Isaiah and says that he will fulfill the prophecy (see 4:16–21). And in John, Jesus begins by recruiting disciples who immediately recognize him as the Messiah and Son of God (see 1:35–51). All of these accounts point to one thing: that as the Savior of all humanity, an important part of Jesus' mission is to proclaim the **Kingdom of God** and to be a sign of the Kingdom. (*Note:* The word *kingdom* might be misleading because it sounds like we are talking about a particular place, or even about Heaven.



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Jesus used the Parable of the Sower to explain how people react to the Word of God (see Mark 4:1–20). He used parables to make people think differently about God and the world. What parable challenges you to think differently?

As will become clear, the Kingdom of God isn't limited to a particular place or time. This is why people sometimes use the term **Reign of God**, which doesn't imply a particular time or place.)

Reflect

The chapter started by asking what your mission in life is. How does the idea of sharing in Jesus' mission help you clarify your purpose in life?

Jesus Teaches about the Kingdom

You might be asking, what is the Kingdom of God? We need to start by understanding a little bit about Jesus and the culture he lived in. Jesus was a Jew and grew up learning the Jewish way of life and practicing the Jewish faith. The Jews understood that God was king over all creation. They believed that the Law given to them at Mount Sinai was God's instrument for ruling people. Some Jews, particularly the Pharisees, believed that anyone who disobeyed even a single law would not be welcome in God's Kingdom. Some Jews also believed that because they were God's Chosen People, anyone who wasn't a Jew could not be part of the Kingdom of God. Another commonly held belief was that God would send a new king, the Messiah, who would use political and military force to make Israel independent again.

Jesus' teaching affirmed the Jewish people's core beliefs that God was lord of creation, that he had called the Jews to be his special people, and that he had given them the Law. But Jesus also challenged misinterpretations of these core beliefs. A look at the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' parables will help make this clear. The Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew, chapters 5–7, is probably the best summary of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels. You may want to take time to read these three chapters if you have not done so before. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assures his listeners, "I have come

Pray It!

Making the Kingdom Real

Here's a prayer to begin each day, asking for God's help in participating in the mission of Christ:

As I begin this day become flesh again in me, Father.
Let your timeless and everlasting love live out this sunrise to sunset within the possibilities, and impossibilities of my own, very human life.

Help me to become Christ to my neighbour,
food to the hungry, health to the sick,
friend to the lonely, freedom to the enslaved,
in all my daily living.

(J. Barrie Shepherd,
Diary of Daily Prayer)

not to abolish [the Law] but to fulfill [it]" (5:17). Jesus then goes on to quote some of the common religious laws and make their true meaning clear.

For example, the Old Law says you should not murder, but Jesus tells us not even to hold on to anger toward another person (see 5:21–26). The Old Law says you not to commit adultery, but Jesus tells you not even to lust after someone who is not your spouse (see 5:27–30). The Old Law says love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for them (see 5:43–48). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that in the Kingdom of God, people will grow to reflect God's perfect love (see 5:48).

Now you might be thinking—just as the people who first heard Jesus—"Who can be this perfect?" That is where the parables come in. They offer a balance to the challenging teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. The **parables** are stories Jesus told that often had a surprising twist, to shock the people who were hearing them into a new way of seeing things.

For example, some Jewish religious leaders taught that sinners (people who break God's Law) are not part of the Kingdom of God and that good people should not associate with them. In response to this, Jesus told the Parable of the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:11–32). The surprising twist is that the father in the story was totally unconcerned about what his neighbors would think of him welcoming home his errant son. The shock is lost on us because we don't understand that in Jesus' time a father was supposed to disown a sinful son—not welcome him back with robe, ring, sandals, and a dinner in his honor! In contrast to what the religious leaders of Jesus' time taught, the parable teaches that any sinner who repents is welcome in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus taught so much more about the Kingdom by using parables. In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (see Luke 16:19–31), Jesus taught that a rich person who ignores the needs of poor people is not part of the Kingdom of God. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:30–37), he taught that even those people who aren't Jews can be



Although the road traveled by the good Samaritan would have been rugged and mountainous, this portrayal sets it in the lush landscape of the Nicaraguan countryside. By imagining Jesus' stories in settings we are familiar with, artists help the stories come alive for us.

members of the Kingdom of God. And in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (see Matthew 18:23–35), Jesus taught that even though God is quick and generous to forgive us, we cannot be part of God's Kingdom if we do not practice forgiveness ourselves. Thus in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals the ultimate meaning of the Jewish Law, and in the parables he reveals how God wants to save us, although no one has ever kept the Law perfectly.

So to summarize, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is wherever people are trying to live out God's call to love and forgiveness in a way that goes beyond the "minimum requirements." Anyone can be in the Kingdom, and sometimes the people you least expect are already part of it. You don't have to be perfect to be in the Kingdom, but you do have to be willing to let the Holy Spirit help you grow more perfect in your love and forgiveness.

Reflect

Make a list of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God as described in this chapter. Now make a list of the characteristics of the community life at your school or parish or home. Compare the lists. What do you learn?

Jesus Lives the Kingdom of God

If someone advises you to be honest, and a week later you see the person cheating on a test, you probably wouldn't believe much else the person said. The same was true for Jesus: people wouldn't have believed him just because he had an inspiring vision of the Kingdom of God—they believed him because he actually lived the Reign of God. People who were around Jesus experienced God's

Live It!

Holiness in Daily Life

"Don't let what you can't do interfere with what you can." These words of former UCLA basketball coach John Wooden became one young person's motto and helped her face challenges and live a truly holy life. At the age of nine, Carrie Mach was diagnosed with cancer. In the years that followed, up until her death at age seventeen, she underwent twelve major surgeries and several rounds of radiation and chemotherapy.

Though sad and angry at first, Carrie embraced her struggle, and through her faith in Christ, found her purpose in life: reaching out to others who had cancer, telling her story to people her age, and writing poetry. Her message: never allow adversity to rob you of your spirit, but see each day as a precious gift and an opportunity to be who God made you to be. Carrie's life teaches that holiness begins by looking at life with gratitude. In her words, "You will be amazed at how many good things you can find."

Although her life was relatively short, because of her faith, Carrie inspired thousands of people in her hometown, in her diocese, and in her state. A special diocesan award was created in her honor to inspire other young people to live with the same faith, hope, and love that Carrie so fully lived (quoted by Laurie Delgatto with Marilyn Kielbasa, in *Church Women*, page 121).

love and power in a profound way. His whole life, his love for people, his care for the poor and unnoticed, his miracles, his acceptance of his suffering and death made his words real and revealed the nature of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' miracles are a powerful sign that he made the Kingdom of God present. But before we talk about his miracles, let us look at some other ways people experienced the Kingdom of God when they were around Jesus Christ. One way that is easy to overlook is that Jesus welcomed everybody. Jesus spent time with the rich and the poor, the young and the old, saintly people and known sinners. He was always eating with people; he loved a good meal and conversation. He even invited himself to people's homes to stay (see the story of Zacchaeus, in Luke 19:1–10). In Jesus' acceptance of every person, many people saw a sign of the Kingdom of God.

In fact, Jesus made a special effort to reach out to individuals that “respectable” people shunned. The story of the woman at the well (see John 4:1–42) is a wonderful example. In the story Jesus starts a conversation with a woman he doesn't know, something a proper Jewish man would never do. Even worse, she was a Samaritan woman, and at the time Jews despised Samaritans. Finally, she was probably a known sinner, living with a man who wasn't her husband. The fact that Jesus reached out to sinners and non-Jews scandalized many of the religious leaders of his time. But many people realized that his inclusion of the poor, the sinners, and the outcast was another sign that the Kingdom of God was near.

Another way that Jesus made the Kingdom of God real was through the forgiveness of sins. The Jews believed that only God could forgive sins, which was accomplished by asking the Temple priests to offer animal sacrifices on their behalf. But Jesus claimed the power to forgive sins directly, equating himself with God (see Mark 2:1–12, Luke 7:36–50). Today we take the forgiveness of sins almost for granted, but the people in Jesus' time did not do so. For them, to have their



In the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus provides an abundance of food for hungry people. This miracle is meant to point us to the Eucharist, the nourishment God provides to satisfy our spiritual hunger.

sins forgiven by God was just as miraculous as a physical healing. Because the forgiveness of sins is necessary for eternal life with God, it is actually a more important sign of the Kingdom of God than a physical healing.

Reflect

What is your favorite story about Jesus in the Gospels? Why is this story meaningful to you? What message does this story have about how we should live our lives?

Jesus' Miracles: Making the Kingdom Real

This brings us to miracles. You are probably aware that in the Gospels there are many accounts of Jesus' performing miracles. Jesus' miracles are often grouped into four categories: physical healings (curing people of paralysis, blindness, leprosy, and so on); exorcisms (driving out demons); bringing the dead back to life (see Mark 5:1–23, Luke 7:11–17, John 11:1–44); and nature miracles (feeding five thousand people with a few fish, walking on water, calming storms, and so on). *THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE*, published by Saint Mary's Press, has an index that lists all Jesus' miracles and parables.

The **miracles** show that Jesus had power over all creation—even demons—and that in the Kingdom of God, we are rescued from evil, suffering, pain, and death. No wonder those who walked with Jesus, who watched him perform these mighty works, were convinced that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. They realized that Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are linked together—you cannot have one without the other. Jesus says, “Even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and

Did You Know?

Four Portraits of Jesus

“Should I use an AGD?” Jamie asked. Baffled, his teacher responded, “What’s an AGD?” “An attention-grabbing device,” said Jamie, explaining that he learned to start his papers with something to immediately draw readers into the theme of his work. The Gospel writers used this technique.

Mark, addressing persecuted Christians, opens with words that summarize his whole Gospel and alert disciples that they must follow Jesus even unto death: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). To know Jesus as the Son of God is to believe that he is the suffering Messiah who died on the cross and who now lives as their Risen Lord.

Matthew grabs the attention of his Jewish Christian audience with a genealogy that connects Jesus to Abraham and David. Accordingly, Jesus becomes the authoritative interpreter of Jewish Law, who brings all that has gone before to fulfillment.

Luke packs tandem accounts of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus with hints of what he will develop in his Gospel: women and poor people are models of faith, Jesus is the savior of all, and salvation is cause for great joy.

In a short but symbolic prologue, John spells out the themes of his Gospel: Jesus is the pre-existent Word of God, the fullest Revelation of God. Those who walk in his light come to know God.

How would you introduce the Good News to people of this century?

Scripture Connection

The Kingdom Parables

The Gospel of Matthew is structured around five long speeches—also called discourses—given by Jesus in the Gospel. Read Matthew 13:1–53, the third great discourse. It is all parables or explanations of parables. In trying to help people understand something as mysterious as the Kingdom of God (which Jesus calls the “Kingdom of heaven” in Matthew), he used ordinary objects like seeds and light, salt and yeast. He chose everyday actions like farming, fishing, and baking. In doing so, he helped the people of his time understand the new life that comes with the Kingdom of God. He makes it clearer that the Kingdom of God is not a place we are trying to get to but a reality that we can experience here on earth through faith in him.

understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38).

The miracles in Scripture—whether performed by or through God the Father, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit—are all signs of God’s power and loving presence. Many people continue to experience miracles, often in response to prayer. Because our modern minds want scientific proof, some people have a hard time accepting the reality of miracles. But just because some people do not believe in them does not mean that miracles aren’t real! And believing in miracles doesn’t mean that you have to believe that God suspends the laws of nature on a regular basis. For people who believe in the Kingdom of God, a star-filled sky, the recovery of a loved one who was seriously ill, and the birth of each new baby can all be experienced as miraculous events.

Reflect

What do you believe about miracles? Have you ever witnessed an event you consider to be a miracle?

Jesus' Disciples Share the Mission

Jesus did one more important thing in his public life. At the beginning of his ministry (see Matthew 4:18–22, Mark 1:16–20, Luke 5:1–11, John 1:35–51), Jesus gathered a group of women and men whom he taught by his word and example. We call them **disciples**—which means students or followers—and Jesus was preparing them to share in his mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God. The Gospels speak about twelve special disciples who were Jesus’ inner circle: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot (see Matthew 10:2–4). They are sometimes called the Twelve, or the twelve **Apostles**. The number calls to mind the twelve Tribes of ancient Israel—

another sign of the continuity between the Old and New Covenants. The bishops of the Church are the direct successors of the Apostles.

Jesus had many other disciples besides the Apostles. These disciples were married and unmarried, poor and wealthy, young and old, women and men. In fact, the Gospels tell about a group of women who were among Jesus' closest followers. Luke names some of them: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, "and many others, who provided for them out of their resources" (Luke 8:3). These women not only financed Jesus' ministry but also traveled with him throughout his ministry and became witnesses to his life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Because many rabbis from Jesus' time warned

Saintly Profiles

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)

Fame. Comfort. Power. Like Jesus in the desert, Saint Francis faced down these temptations to find his purpose in life. He was the son of a wealthy twelfth-century Italian merchant, and early in his life, he was devoted to living the good life and his social status.

Then his life changed. He became seriously ill after a soldiering experience, and he began to rethink his values. Encountering a begging leper, he embraced the man, gave him money, and began to spend more time with the poor and outcasts. His father was furious for what he saw as a waste of time and dragged him before the local bishop to set Francis straight. Instead, Francis stripped out of his fine clothes, gave them to his father, and renounced all worldly wealth and possessions.

At first Francis's former party-mates looked at his new way of life and scoffed. However, there was something remarkably appealing about the way Francis loved the poor and the sick, prayed, and preached the Good News. Francis is known for his prayer life, particularly the way that his prayers reflect the joy and awe of God that he experienced in nature. Wild animals were known to flock to him and even obey him!

The joy and freedom with which Francis lived as a follower of Christ soon attracted so many followers that he had to establish an order and write a rule for them. Today people are fond of summarizing the rule with these words: "Preach the gospel. If necessary, use words." Saint Francis's feast day is October 4.



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Catholic Wisdom

A Modern Miracle

Every evening the cook at the Catholic parish in Ribera del Fresno, Spain, began to prepare dinner for the town's poor people and the children of the nearby orphanage. This night, January 25, 1949, the cook could see there was not enough rice and meat to feed everyone. She prayed to Blessed John Macías, the town's patron, and shortly thereafter noticed the rice pot was overflowing. She filled additional pots, but when the overflow continued, she called in witnesses. At evening's end everyone had been fed and there were leftovers.

Vatican experts and theologians examined the leftover rice and interviewed twenty-two witnesses, but found no natural explanation. The multiplication of rice at Ribera del Fresno is considered a modern miracle.

In the process of naming saints, the Church has approved hundreds of miracles during the last century alone. The Church has a scrupulous process for approving miracles, and far more possible miracles are rejected than accepted. Miracles like the one at Ribera del Fresno remind us that God's grace continues to overflow in the modern world (based on Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints*, pages 209–210).

against even speaking with women in public, Jesus' close association with these women seems to be another way he challenged commonly held beliefs of his time in order to make the Kingdom of God present.

The relationship between Jesus and his disciples teaches us several things about the Kingdom of God. If you've been following closely, you may be able to guess what they are. First, it teaches us that the Kingdom of God isn't about just the relationship between you and Jesus but the relationship between you, other believers, and Jesus. We need the love and support of other Christians to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. Second, the relationship between Jesus and his disciples teaches us that God wants us to take part in proclaiming the Gospel message. Jesus sent the Twelve out on their own (see Matthew 10:1–7), and another time he sent out seventy disciples to be his messengers (see Luke 10:1–20). Even though as God, Jesus could have accomplished everything needed without human help, he honors our freedom by giving us the responsibility of being partners in his mission.

Everything that we have just said about the disciples is also true for the Church today. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church has the responsibility for continuing Jesus' mission of proclaiming and making real the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ has given the Church permission to act in his name. Despite this some people still ask, "If I believe in Jesus and live a good life, why do I need to belong to a faith community?" The answer is

simple: to be a disciple of Jesus means you must belong to a community committed to continuing his mission together.

Even though the answer is simple, it doesn't mean that living it out is always easy. The Church has never been a perfect example of the Kingdom of God and does not claim to be.

Conflict, sin, and scandal can be found in both the local churches and the universal Church. The Church can only claim to be made up of sinful but redeemed (saved) people, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to be a sign of the Reign of God in the world. Fortunately we have Jesus' promise that God's love will always prevail.

Reflect

How do you experience the love and support of other Christians? How do you give that love and support to other disciples?

Review Questions

1. What is Jesus' mission? How did he prepare for it?
2. What is the Kingdom (Reign) of God? How did Jesus teach his followers about the Kingdom?
3. What images did Jesus use to make the Kingdom real for his followers?
4. What are the four categories of miracles? What do miracles show us about Jesus?
5. Who were the Apostles, and what was Jesus preparing them to do?
6. List the twelve Apostles and explain the symbolism of why there were twelve.
7. What does Jesus' relationship with his disciples teach us about the Kingdom of God?



10 Jesus' Death

Around AD 30 a traveling Jewish rabbi made a decision that would change the world forever. For several years he had been traveling in Galilee and Samaria, teaching, healing, and forming a band of disciples to continue his mission after his departure. Now his disciples were ready for the final challenge that lay ahead. One of them just announced that he believed the rabbi was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Then the rabbi—known as Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter—made the decision to travel to Jerusalem, where he knew he would meet his death.

FAQ

- Why did Jesus have to die?
- How does the death of Jesus save us?

The **Passion** (the word we use to describe Jesus' suffering) and death of Jesus are visible parts of Catholic life. Catholic crucifixes have the dead body of Christ—called the *corpus*—on them, even though most other Christians remember Jesus with empty crosses. We have special prayer forms—the **Stations of the Cross** and the mysteries of the Rosary—to help us reflect on the meaning of Jesus' death. On Good Friday we strip our churches bare to emphasize the emptiness and sorrow that Jesus and his disciples felt on that fateful day long ago. Why does Jesus' death have such importance for Catholics? Maybe your question is even more basic: Why did Jesus have to die at all?

Words to Look For

- *Passion*
- *Pharisees*
- *chief priests*
- *Stations of the Cross*
- *scribes*
- *obedience*

The Jewish and Roman Leaders Wanted Jesus Dead

The mystery of the Incarnation tells us that Jesus was both true God and true man. So it is no surprise that we believe in both natural and supernatural reasons behind the death of Jesus. To fully understand the importance of Jesus' death, we need to understand both sets of reasons. Let's start with the natural—the human—reasons.

The Apostles' Creed states that Jesus Christ “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.” This statement tells us that a Roman governor—Pontius Pilate—was involved in Jesus' death, but it doesn't mention the Jewish religious leaders. The Gospels are clear that both Jewish and Roman leaders wanted Jesus dead. But why?

For the religious leaders, the answer is fairly clear: Jesus challenged their authority to such an extent that they believed Jesus would lead the common people to rebel against the leaders' teaching. The previous chapter mentioned how Jesus' mission confronted some of the teachings of the Pharisees and priests. Following are some specific examples:

- **Mark 2:23—3:6.** The **Pharisees** and **scribes** taught that you could do absolutely no work on the Sabbath. Jesus' disciples plucked grain on the Sabbath, and Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus challenged the Pharisees' and scribes' teaching by saying, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath” (2:27).
- **Mark 2:1–12.** Jesus claimed to have the power to forgive sins, which the Jewish religious leaders believed was a power that belonged to God alone.
- **Luke 16:19–31.** Many of the religious leaders believed that having material wealth was a sign of being right with

Did You Know?

Christians and Jews

During the earliest years of the Church, when most Christians were also Jews, animosity sprang up. Some Jews persecuted the Jews who believed in Christ. The language of John's Gospel reflects this discord. The Gospel according to John refers to those responsible for Jesus' death as “the Jews,” even though it was a relatively small group of Jewish leaders. Through the ages it became a misperception that the whole Jewish race is responsible for Jesus' death, and this misperception has been used to justify everything from discrimination to genocide.

Even today anti-Semitism (the sentiment of hatred against Jews) is seen in many parts of the world. This is a gross misunderstanding of the Bible. Christianity has no room in it for hatred and intolerance. Contemporary Church teaching tells us that not only are the Jews *not* to blame for Jesus' death but that we are spiritual descendants of Judaism, and that Christians and Jews have much to learn from each other.

God. Jesus claimed that God also blessed the poor. He even taught that being rich while ignoring the poor was a sin.

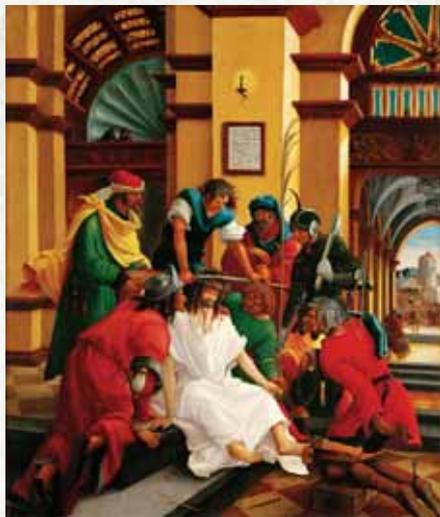
- **Luke 15:1–10.** The religious leaders avoided having anything to do with common sinners such as prostitutes and tax collectors. Yet Jesus freely associated with these people and chided the Pharisees for avoiding them.

When Jesus decided to bring his mission to Jerusalem, things came to a head. Jesus' presence in the city that was the center of Jewish faith was too direct a challenge to ignore. First of all, when Jesus arrived, crowds welcomed him as a triumphant king (see Matthew 21:1–11)! Next, Jesus went to the Temple, the very seat of the priests' and scribes' authority, and cast out the moneychangers (see Matthew 21:12–13). He did this to protest how the chief priests and scribes had let commerce and profit become

intertwined with the practice of the Jewish faith. Mark and Luke indicate that it was after this act that the religious leaders began looking for a way to kill Jesus (see Mark 11:18).

However, the Jewish leaders could not put Jesus to death simply because he challenged their authority. No, the crime they charged him with was blasphemy, the crime of speaking irreverently about God. The **chief priests** and scribes claimed that Jesus committed blasphemy when he claimed powers for himself that belonged to God alone. According to the Law of the Old Covenant, a person could be stoned to death for this. The irony is that as the Son of God, Jesus was not committing blasphemy but simply speaking the truth—a truth that the religious leaders of his time could not accept.

The Romans' reasons for wanting the death of Jesus are a little harder to figure out from the Gospel accounts. Because Israel was part of the Roman Empire at the time, we know that the Jewish religious leaders needed the backing of Pilate to have someone executed. As the Roman governor of the region, Pilate ordered all public executions. Most likely the chief priests convinced Pilate that Jesus was the potential leader of a rebellion (see Luke 23:5)—which the Romans were quick to squash.



By showing the violence associated with the Passion and death of Jesus, artists remind us that he really suffered for us. Do the depictions of violence in today's popular media have any positive value?

The Gospel accounts indicate that Pilate did not want to execute Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, Pilate even publicly declares Jesus innocent three times. But facing an angry mob, he ultimately gives permission for Jesus' death. Were the Gospel authors downplaying Pilate's responsibility for Jesus' death to make the Christian faith more appealing to Roman citizens? Or did the otherwise ruthless Pilate (we know of his ruthlessness from other writings of the time) have a soft spot in his heart for Jesus?

Reflect

Many people have been killed because they spoke the truth and challenged injustice. Who comes to mind for you? How is Jesus' death similar to their deaths? How is it different?

Jesus' Death Is the Real Thing

Some people think that because Jesus was God, his death was no big deal for him. After all, didn't he know how it would all turn out? But the Gospel accounts take great care to show that Jesus experienced doubt, pain, and fear, as he was betrayed, put through a mock trial, tortured, and crucified. He was fully human and was not saved from these human feelings because of his divine nature. Before his arrest he prayed in the garden at Gethsemane, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus knew that the end was near and, like any of us, did not want to experience the pain of a torturous death.

Jesus' execution was especially brutal. A Roman execution was meant to be as horrible as possible to frighten people into **obedience**. First, Jesus was scourged (whipped) with a

Live It!

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty years old. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned—put together—have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one solitary life (attributed to James Allen Francis).

whip that had pieces of bone and metal embedded in the leather. It was meant to tear the skin from a person's back. Many who were executed died from this alone. Then, Jesus had to carry on his bloody back the crossbeam on which he would be crucified. Finally, he was stripped of his clothes to completely humiliate him and nailed through his wrists to a crossbeam, which was lifted into place on a permanent post. His arms and feet would have been tied to the cross to keep his body from tearing free of the nails. People who were crucified often lived for days before dying from blood loss, exposure, or the inability to breathe. According to the Gospel accounts, Jesus died in six hours or less, no



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“And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7–8).

doubt in part due to the blood he lost from the scourging.

It is reassuring for us to know that Jesus Christ shared our humanity in his fear of pain and death. It isn't wrong to want to avoid pain and death. But Christ's commitment to following the will of God was stronger than his fear. He could have stayed away from Jerusalem, or he could have slipped out of town when things started to heat up. But he didn't. He willingly accepted one of the most painful and humiliating ways to die that human beings have ever devised. His final words on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46), signify the complete trust he ultimately had in his Father.

Reflect

Why is it important that Jesus truly suffered and truly died? What difference would it make for our salvation if his suffering and death were not real?

The Religious Meaning of the Cross

Jesus Christ's death was not merely a chance event or an unfortunate set of circumstances. His death was part of the mystery of God's plan for the salvation of the human race. Saint Peter, in talking about the death of Jesus, said, “This man [was] handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts of the Apostles 2:23). This doesn't mean that Pilate, the soldiers, the chief priests and scribes,