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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 began 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*.

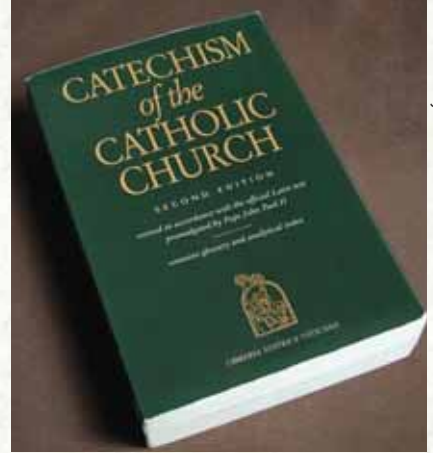
For example, the *Catechism* is divided into four major sections. Each section reflects an important aspect of Catholic teaching. This book follows the same structure. After some introductory chapters, you will find the following sections:

- **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.



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

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!

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

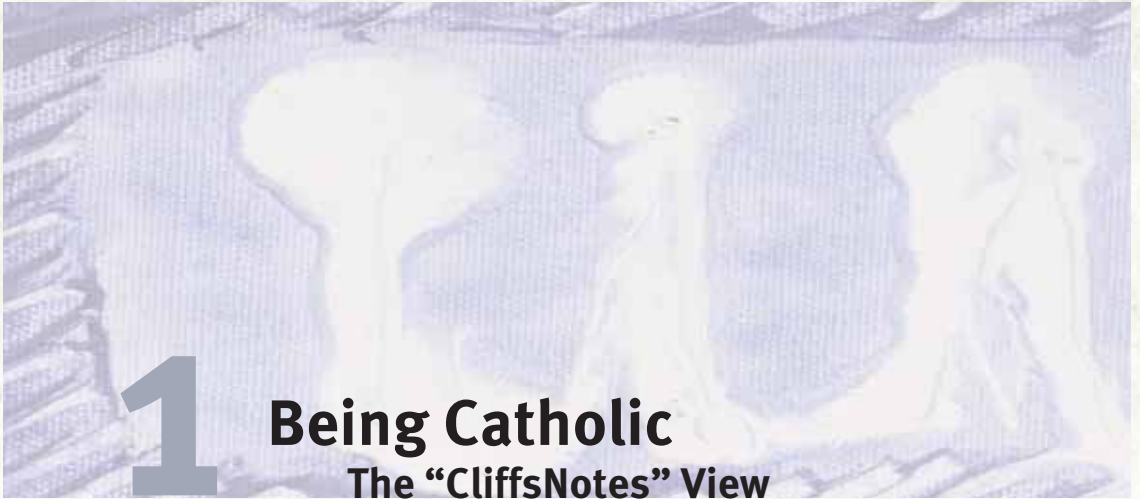
You can make use of this handbook in many ways. You may be using it as a textbook for your parish religious education program or Confirmation preparation program. But this handbook isn't meant to be used just as a textbook. It's a guide you can use in many different ways.

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 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 tells 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.