

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

THE  
Catholic  
Faith  
Handbook  
FOR YOUTH



saint mary's press

THE  
Catholic Faith Handbook  
FOR YOUTH

SECOND EDITION

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

SECOND EDITION

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



saint mary's press

The Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found this catechetical text, copyright 2008, to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Nihil Obstat: Rev. William M. Becker, STD

Censor Librorum

September 28, 2007

Imprimatur: † Most Rev. Bernard J. Harrington, DD

Bishop of Winona

September 28, 2007

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat or imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed, nor do they assume any legal responsibility associated with publication.

Janet Claussen, Brian Singer-Towns, and Clare vanBrandwijk were the principal authors. Nora Bradbury-Haehl, Ellen Cavanaugh, Maura Hagarty, Barbara Murray, Betty Singer-Towns, and Fred Thelen authored the supplemental articles. Robert Feduccia Jr. authored the Signs and Symbols guide. Sandra Iwanski and Janet Claussen prepared the Frequently Asked Questions index. Eileen Daily, Laurie Delgatto, Marilyn Kielbasa, Lorraine Kilmartin, and Thomas Zanzig were the principal consultants and reviewers.

The publishing team for this book included Brian Singer-Towns, general editor; Margaret Hentz, indexer; prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary's Press.

Copyright © 2008 by Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320, www.smp.org. Text updated in 2011 to reflect the third edition of the *Roman Missal*. All rights reserved. No part of this handbook may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

2813 (PO3136)

ISBN 978-0-88489-987-7, paper

ISBN 978-0-88489-988-4, hardcover

ISBN 978-1-59982-192-4, digital

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Singer-Towns, Brian.

The Catholic faith handbook for youth / Brian Singer-Towns with Janet Claussen, Clare vanBrandwijk, and other contributors. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 978-0-88489-987-7 (pbk.) — ISBN 978-0-88489-988-4 (hardcover)

1. Catechisms, English. 2. Catholic Church—Catechisms—English.

3. Christian education—Textbooks for youth—Catholic. I. Claussen, Janet. II. VanBrandwijk, Clare. III. Title.

BX1961.S56 2008

268'.82—dc22

2007042479





# Contents

Introduction	7
1. Being Catholic: The “CliffsNotes” View	13
2. Knowing God: Reason and Revelation	20
<b>Part A: The Creed</b>	
3. Faith	32
4. God Our Father	40
5. The Human Person	48
6. Jesus Christ: True God and True Man	56
7. Jesus’ Message and Mission	64
8. Jesus’ Death	74
9. Jesus’ Resurrection	83
10. The Holy Spirit	92
11. The Mission of the Catholic Church	100
12. The Organization of the Catholic Church	111
13. The Last Things	123
<b>Part B: Liturgy and Sacraments</b>	
14. Introduction to the Liturgy	134
15. Introduction to the Sacraments	145
16. Baptism	154
17. Confirmation	164

18. The Eucharist	172
19. Sacraments of Healing	183
20. Sacraments at the Service of Communion	193

### **Part C: Christian Morality**

21. Introduction to Christian Morality	206
22. Social Justice	216
23. Sources of Moral Truth	226
24. Honoring God	236
25. Honoring Family	245
26. Respecting Life	253
27. Respecting Sexuality	265
28. Respecting Material Goods	276
29. Respecting Truth	285
30. The Moral Life	294

### **Part D: Christian Prayer**

31. Introduction to Prayer	304
32. The Forms of Prayer	314
33. Personal Prayer	323
34. Praying with the Scriptures	332
35. Praying Together	342
36. The Lord's Prayer: God's Glory	352
37. The Lord's Prayer: Human Need	361

### **Catholic Quick Facts**

Catholic Beliefs and Practices	372
Catholic Prayers and Devotions	382
Catholic Signs and Symbols	392
Patron Saints and Their Causes	398
Catholic Terms and Definitions	409
Timeline	438

Frequently Asked Questions Index	444
Index	448
Acknowledgments	461
Endnotes Cited in Quotations from the <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> and Other Documents of the U.S. Catholic Bishops	470



## **“My Dear Young Friends”**

Pope John Paul II 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 that the Holy Father (another name for the Pope) constantly lived out, 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 teachings and beliefs 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.



Pope John Paul II was an enthusiastic supporter of young people.

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.

## 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 a couple of introductory chapters, you will find the following sections:

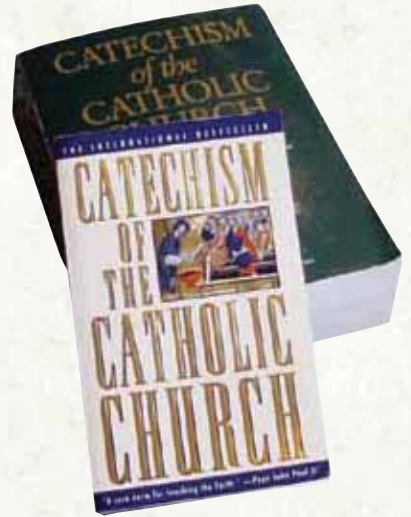
- **Part A.** This section is an overview of what Catholics believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. It is based on the Apostles' Creed.
- **Part B.** This section is an overview of how Catholics worship God and encounter Jesus Christ through the Seven Sacraments of the Church.

- **Part C.** This section is about Catholic moral decision-making, sin, and conscience. The Ten Commandments are used as the basis for exploring and understanding what the Church teaches about specific moral issues.
- **Part D.** This section is about the Church's teaching on 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 also contains additional short articles to help you further study and live these teachings. Here are short explanations of the five 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 trivia!



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.

## Looking Back←

The Catholic Church has a long and rich history, and most of us are familiar with only a little piece of it. The Looking Back articles will help you understand and appreciate more of our history. They describe historical events, present the teaching of saints and Church leaders, and explain why certain Church councils were called. Through the Looking Back 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-seven 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.

### **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 timeline 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.

This handbook also includes two indices: an index of questions frequently asked by teens and a subject index.

### **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 at the end of 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!





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 rosaries, 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 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 brief overview about what we believe as Catholics. But don't settle for this "CliffsNotes" view of Catholicism. Let it whet your appetite for exploring the rest of the book!

## Why Are All These People Catholic?

It is estimated that there are just 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! 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

### Did You Know?

#### How Many Catholics Are There?

##### Catholics in North America

Canada: 13 million Catholics (43 percent of the population)  
Mexico: 95 million Catholics (89 percent of the population)  
United States: 69.1 million Catholics (23 percent of the population)

##### Catholics in the World

Africa: 148.8 million (16.9 percent of the population)  
North America: 233.8 million (45.7 percent of the population)  
South America: 315 million (85 percent of the population)  
Asia: 113.5 million (2.9 percent of the population)  
Europe: 278.7 million (39.5 percent of the population)  
Oceania: 8.6 million (26.5 percent of the population)

(Source: 2007 *Catholic Almanac*)

as people who want to change structures in society to create a more just world.

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 the beliefs of the Catholic faith that are rooted in the revelation of the Scriptures 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 world view 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.

## Some Core Catholic Beliefs

The following list is meant to give you a quick glimpse of the core beliefs of Catholic Christians. 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 God 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 Sarah, and the people of Israel. But the people often broke their covenant promises.

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)



- Ultimately God sent his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, as savior for the human race. Christ was both fully God and fully 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.



In this painting Mary and the Apostles are receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Do you think the artist conveyed the importance of Mary? How?

- God has revealed himself to be Trinity, that is, the mystery of one God in three divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This mystery cannot be arrived at by reason but 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 bishops of the Church.
- The Bible, or the Sacred Scriptures, is another source of God’s revealed truth for Catholics. The Bible is closely connected to Sacred Tradition. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Bible to write what God wants us to know for our salvation.
- 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 find their eternal punishment in hell.

## 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. We believe that in the 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 honor 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 believe 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,

## 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 believe 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 of Cana (see 2:1–11). At the cross Jesus tells the beloved disciple, “Here is your mother” (John 19:27), which the Church teaches 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, and without a doubt she was very active in spreading the Gospel message about her son.

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.



including abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and human cloning.

- Serving people in need and working to transform society are essential elements of Catholic life. We believe that 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.

## Looking Back

### 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*, number 2)

### 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 with 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.

### For Further Reflection

- What attracts you to the Catholic faith? If someone asked, “Why are you Catholic?” how would you answer?
- Do you know a faithful and committed Catholic? Consider asking the person about what she or he finds motivating about the Catholic faith.
- 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 in later chapters.
- Which practices from the list of “Some Core Catholic Practices” are you most attracted to? Why are those practices attractive to you?

## Pray It!

### Act of Faith

The Act of Faith is an old and traditional prayer of the Catholic Church. People prayed 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.



## 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

#### Words to Look For

- *canon*
- *reason*
- *Revelation*
- *covenant*
- *apostolic Tradition*
- *Scriptures*
- *Gospels*
- *New Testament*
- *Magisterium*
- *salvation history*
- *Israelites*
- *Law*
- *Old Testament*
- *inspiration*

need for God and how we can come to know the truth about God.

## 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” (*The Holy Longing*, page 5).

## Reason and Revelation

Well, if we all have God-shaped holes, how do we discover the God who 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

## 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. At that time the list was considered 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 Catholic Church used the Greek version, which contained the additional books of Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch. These books are sometimes called the Apocrypha (Greek for “hidden”) or the deuterocanonical (Greek for “second canon”) books.



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 create such order and possibility. Or when you experience the voice directing you 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 original books of the Old Testament were written in Hebrew on scrolls, usually one book on one scroll. In Jewish worship services, the Scriptures are still read from scrolls like the one pictured here.

For these reasons the Church teaches that 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. Through the natural light of human reason, 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 the Church teaches that 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.<sup>1</sup> (*CCC*, number 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.

**Revelation** in this sense is God making himself and his divine plan known to the human race through words and deeds in human history. This Revelation is communicated to us in the Bible's stories 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: **apostolic Tradition** and the Sacred **Scriptures**.

## The Scriptures 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 the apostolic Tradition, or sometimes just the 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

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!

**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 the Scriptures and Tradition as two modes of Revelation, but they are closely connected and together form a single sacred deposit of truth 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 the Scriptures 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, it is the particular and exclusive responsibility of the bishops in union with the Pope—who are also called the **Magisterium**—to faithfully teach, interpret, and preserve the Scriptures and Tradition for all believers until Christ returns in glory.

## The Big Picture of the Sacred Scriptures

Most of this book will be devoted to helping you understand the Tradition of the Catholic Church. It is not intended to be a Bible study resource. For that we suggest you find a book 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 the Scriptures, and this book helping you understand Tradition.



This is the opening page from a fifteenth-century Bible. Before the printing press was invented, Bibles were copied and illustrated by hand. How long do you think it would take you to copy an entire Bible by hand?

However, you will better appreciate the apostolic Tradition if you understand some of the big picture of God's relationship with the human race, as told in the Bible. This big picture is sometimes called **salvation history**, because it shows how God has worked within the people and events of human history to restore our lost union with him.

The story of salvation history begins with Creation. In the beginning of the Bible, we learn that God created the world and all that is in it, and everything was good. The story of Adam and Eve tells us that God intended us to be in direct communion with him. But the sin of our first parents disrupted that perfect communion. Yet despite their sin, God continued to care for them and promised them salvation.

We then go on to read how the world fell under the domination of sin. In the story of the great flood, God attempted to wipe out sin. Afterward, he made an everlasting covenant with Noah and the whole human race never to destroy the world by flood again. Later he made another covenant with Abraham, promising that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars, and that through them "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Abraham's descendants ended up living for a time in Egypt, where they eventually became slaves. God sent Moses to free the people and lead them to a Promised Land. God entered into yet another covenant with these **Israelites**, promising that they would be his Chosen People. A special **Law**, summed up by the Ten Commandments, marked this covenant.

After a period marked by hardship and wandering, the Israelites eventually entered and settled in the Promised Land. At first they were only a loosely organized association of twelve tribes, but eventually God appointed kings to rule over them. The greatest king was David, who was a brave warrior and charismatic leader. David established Jerusalem as the capital

## Looking Back

### *Sola Scriptura!*

*Sola Scriptura* means "Scripture alone," and it was a rallying cry for some of the Protestant reformers who broke away from the Catholic 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 the Scriptures alone. This disagreement over the source of Revelation continues to be a major difference between Catholic Christians and many Protestant Christians yet today. Through patient dialogue, the different Christian churches are more tolerant and appreciative of one another than they have been in centuries.



city. After David's death, his son Solomon ruled. Solomon made Jerusalem a mighty city, and he also built an impressive Temple in which to worship God.



Saint Thomas Aquinas is a doctor of the Church, an official title given to only a few wise and holy men and women whose teachings are especially worthy of study.

Unfortunately after Solomon's death, the kingdom split into two parts, a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. Two royal lines ruled over these kingdoms for several hundred years. Many of the royalty, the religious leaders, and even the people strayed from their covenant with God, falling into idolatry (worshiping false gods) and greed. God raised up prophets to call the people to reform their lives and warn them that if they didn't, bad things would happen. And bad

things did happen: Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in 721 BC, and the southern kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 BC. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and led the leaders into exile.

During the Exile in Babylon, the prophets' message became a prophecy of hope. They told the people that even though their kingdom had been destroyed, God would not abandon them. They foretold the coming of a savior who would lead the people to peace. After nearly fifty years of Hebrew exile, a sympathetic Persian king let the people return to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. Now known as the Jews, they would never again be an independent nation until modern times. Persian, Greek, and Roman governors would rule them until the time of Jesus.

It was into this world that Jesus was born. He was a Jew, a member of the Chosen People, and a descendant of King David. He became known as the Messiah, meaning "the anointed one." His followers grew to understand that he was the savior the prophets had predicted. God established his new and final 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).

The Church was founded after Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension, when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles at Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of the New Testament show us how from the beginning the Apostles spread the message of God's love by preaching about Jesus



Christ and encouraging people to believe in him as Lord and Savior. Through their work the Church grew rapidly, becoming the worldwide body it is today.

## The Organization of the Bible

The books of the Bible are actually organized into sections, and if you are familiar with these sections, it makes it easier to find your way around in the Bible. The **Old Testament** has forty-six books divided into the following sections:

- **The Pentateuch** (Genesis through Deuteronomy). These five books are the core of the Old Testament. They tell the stories of Creation, sin, and the origin of God's Chosen People.
- **The Historical Books** (Joshua through 2 Maccabees). These books tell how the Israelites settled in the Promised Land. They also tell the stories of their great—and not-so-great—kings.
- **The Wisdom Books** (Job through Sirach). These are books of poetry and the collected wisdom of the Israelites.
- **The Prophets** (Isaiah through Malachi). These books are the collected speeches and biographies of the Israelite prophets. The prophets spoke for God against idolatry and injustice.

The **New Testament** has twenty-seven books divided into the following sections:

- **The Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). These four books are the most important books for Christians because they convey the meaning of Christ Jesus' life and teaching as their central message.
- **The Acts of the Apostles**. This book is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke and tells the stories of how the early Church spread.

## 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 of “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's feast day on January 28.

- **The Epistles** (Romans through Jude). These are twenty-one letters, written by Paul and other early Church leaders, that give teachings and guidance to individuals and the first Christian churches.
- **The Book of Revelation.** This book records the visions of an early Christian named John.



This is a sixth-century mosaic of Saint Matthew, the Gospel writer. Notice his tools: pen, ink, and scrolls. What might the angel in the upper corner symbolize?

## 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 believe 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 Catholic Church teaches that 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 believe in the religious truth that God created the world and everything in it, without having to believe 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.

## For Further Reflection

- Take a moment to meditate on the idea that God was willing to take the radical step of becoming fully human to communicate with us. What a tremendous sign of his love! What are some signs of God's love in your life?
- How familiar are you with the Bible? Find a Bible and open it up to the table of contents. Scan the list of books for any that look familiar. Pick one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) and make a commitment to read a chapter a day.
- What is your favorite story from the Bible? What message does that story have for your life and for your relationship with God?
- 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?

## 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 the Jesus story, about God coming to Earth 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 story shared by Paul Harvey)









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.

Part A

## The Creed



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 Catholic 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.

### **Words to Look For**

- *faith*
- *religion*
- *denominations*
- *ecumenism*
- *Catholic Church*
- *salvation*
- *creed*

Sometimes the two words are used interchangeably. When you say to your parents, “Just trust me!” what you are probably 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 you struggle to believe in God, or struggle in making a moral choice, you are being exactly what God created you to be—a creature 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.

## Did You Know?

### Those Who Do Not Know Christ

What about a person who has never heard of Jesus? It’s not that person’s fault! Would God condemn that person for not believing in something he or she never heard of? The Church teaches that “in ways known to himself”<sup>1</sup> (CCC, number 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”<sup>2</sup> (CCC, number 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!



But God never gives up on us. Throughout human history God has revealed himself so that we might see him more clearly 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 you fully understand Christ and his message and you still reject him, then you are rejecting God's efforts to be in a loving relationship with you.



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

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 the Scriptures and in 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!

## 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 the Scriptures 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 been spread for two thousand years. These faithful believers have passed faith on from generation to generation by their word and example.

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 the Scriptures 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—the Scriptures and Tradition—are passed on and safeguarded.
- The Sacraments that Jesus instituted are celebrated in Christian 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 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.


 A graphic with the word "LIVE" in large, bold, grey letters and "it!" in smaller, grey letters below it. The "i" in "it!" has a dot above 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 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.

## Looking Back

### 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*, number 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 that person, 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: Christian 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 **Catholic 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!)
- **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.

## 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:

## 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)

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)



Saint Helen is pictured with her son, Saint Constantine. How have your parents and your extended family passed their faith on to you?

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 63). 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.



## For Further Reflection

- 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?
- This chapter mentions that faith seeks understanding, which means it is okay to have questions and doubts about God and the Church! What are some things about God and the Catholic Church you would like to better understand? See if you can find them in the Frequently Asked Questions index of this handbook.
- Some people try to use science to prove there is no God. Some people try to use science to prove there is a God. How would you explain the relationship between science and belief in God?
- 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?

## 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 and 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.



## 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

### Words to Look For

- *atheists*
- *Trinity*
- *monotheism*
- *Creator*
- *Original Sin*
- *angels*

in God (see the article “Proofs for the Existence of God,” on page 44), 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.

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.

## The Trinity: One God, Three Persons

Let’s start with the foundational image that God has revealed to us, the **Trinity**. The Trinity is the mystery of one God in three Persons. It is the central mystery of the Christian faith, and we call it a mystery because it cannot be understood only by reason—God alone can make 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

## 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)*



Romans, for example—believed in and worshiped a collection of gods and goddesses. God revealed himself to the Chosen People as the one and only God.



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

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 relation-



ships 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.

But let's 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

## Looking Back

### 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.

## 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.

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).

You might be asking yourself, “If we call God Father, does this mean the Catholic Church teaches that God is male?” Absolutely not. In fact, the *Catechism* says, “God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood,<sup>1</sup> which emphasizes God’s immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature” (number 239). The Bible also contains many feminine images of God. However, 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.

### 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



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.

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'


 The logo for LIVE.it features the word "LIVE" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with a small "it" in a lighter font below it. A stylized lightning bolt or spark symbol is positioned above the "E" in "LIVE".

### 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.

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?



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.



Saint Julian spent many hours at the window of her small room, compassionately listening to those who came to her for spiritual advice and hope.

### 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 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).

### For Further Reflection

- Consider the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. What reasons do you have for believing in God? How would you describe God to a friend?
- If God is the creator of everything that is, how do you explain the existence of evil?
- After reading this chapter, what do you think God might want from us?
- We sometimes say that God is both very close to us (immanent) and yet is 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?
- How does the description of angels in the chapter compare with the way angels are portrayed in popular books and movies?

## 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.



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. The Scriptures 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

### **Words to Look For**

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



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!

## 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 the Scriptures 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 stories in its first chapters. Each story has something unique to tell us about God's plan for human beings.

The first story is from a hymn that tells how God created the whole world in seven days (see Genesis 1:1—2:4). Well, actually six days, because the story says God rested on the seventh day. You've probably heard or read this story 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 story in this way.

The key event happens on the sixth day of creation. On that day God created man and woman. But they weren't created like the other 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



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? Christians believe he 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 afflicting 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!

image of God, we have 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 would be creatures who could freely know and love him.

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 story also teaches us that human beings are not meant to be alone (this is also taught in the second Creation story). 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 story 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.

## The Fall from Grace

The second Creation story is in Genesis 2:4—3:24. This is the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. Unlike the first Creation story, in the second story, man is created first, then all the animals, and finally woman. Like the first Creation story, 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 story, God places Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden symbolizes 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

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]” (*The Holy Longing*, page 5). 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).



of holiness and justice. They are friends with God, and from that friendship flows their happiness.

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 Catholic Church explains the impact of Adam and Eve’s sin in its teaching on Original Sin. Much of the Old

## 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)

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, number 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 develops in 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 Christians today still hold that belief. In response the Catholic Church more clearly articulated its teaching on

## Looking Back

### Limbo

*Limbo* comes from a Latin word meaning “border” or “edge.” Because Baptism is necessary for salvation (see John 3:5) but Church leaders knew that God would not condemn an infant to hell just because it died before being baptized, it was theorized that there might be another place those infants would go. Thus, from about the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, some theologians used the word *limbo* to name the destiny of good but unbaptized infants and children. 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” (*The Rites of the Catholic Church*, volume 1, pages 1037 and 1040).



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**.



With the support of his mother, Saint Monica, Saint Augustine overcame the temptations of sin to become one of the great leaders of the Church.

The doctrine of Original Sin is behind another important concept in the Scriptures and 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, and Resurrection have already won the battle, and we just have to decide whose side we are going to be on!

## 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 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)

### For Further Reflection

- 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?
- How are you tempted to make bad choices? When do you feel like Saint Paul: "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 7:18–19)?

## 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 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. 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.



# 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

### Words to Look For

- *Gospels*
- *Incarnation*
- *Immaculate Conception*
- *canon*
- *Theotokos*

contain the books that would be written” (21:25).

In this chapter we look at some basic things the Catholic 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 fully God and fully 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. 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

## 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. The **canon** is the official list of books of the Bible accepted by the Church. These other writings were not accepted because they did not accurately represent the life of Jesus according to the Tradition of the Church. The canon of twenty-seven books in the New Testament that Catholics use today was established by the end of the fourth century.



Gospels, we can see that this is also a mistaken belief. 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 level place or plain (see 6:17).

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 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 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 Scriptures (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 created the Gospels, the authors wrote their stories about Jesus in a way that emphasized the religious truths their communities had learned through the



This painting is titled *The Penitent Saint Peter*. If the image were larger, you could see the tear coming down his cheek. Why is it important for all of us, great and small, to be sorry for our sins and the harm we have caused?

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.

## 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.”

## Saintly Profiles

### Peter

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 things, 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 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.



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 part of the Trinity, fully God himself.



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?

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

## 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 human? 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, number 469).



The mystery of the union of Jesus' divine and human natures in one 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 human. 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. 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. By believing in Jesus and in giving ourselves to him with all our whole hearts, minds, and souls, the Holy Spirit will help us become more fully the image of God, which is our ultimate destiny.

## **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

**LIVE!**  
it

### **Who Is Jesus for You?**

What kind of a relationship do you have with Jesus? Even if you do not have an answer right away, the question can take you on a journey of discovery. 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 Bible stories about Jesus. 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 they have gotten to know Jesus better in their lives. Join in church youth activities and retreats.
4. Reach out and see the face of Jesus in someone in need (see Matthew 25:31–46).

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."

## 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!

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, 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.

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 belief is called 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 Catholic Church celebrates Mary's sinless life on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8).

### For Further Reflection

- 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?
- 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.
- 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?

## Looking Back

### Mistaken Identity: Heresies About Christ

In the first five centuries of the Church, major controversies arose about whether Jesus was both fully human and fully divine (true God and true man.) 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.





## 7 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**

Luke has 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 his 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

### **Words to Look For**

- *Kingdom of God*
- *miracles*
- *Apostles*
- *parables*
- *disciples*

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

Outside of this one story, we know very little about Jesus Christ's 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 these accounts point to one thing: that as the savior of all humanity, an important part of Jesus' mission is to proclaim

## 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*)



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.

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.)



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?

## 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 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 onto anger toward another person (see 5:21–26). The Old Law says 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

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 in Laurie Delgatto with Marilyn Kielbasa, *Church Women*, page 121)

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 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.



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.

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.

## **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 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 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 sins forgiven by God was just as miraculous as a physical healing. Because the

## 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?



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.



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.

## Jesus' Miracles: Making the Kingdom Real

This brings us to miracles. You are probably aware that in the Gospels there are many stories 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* 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 understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38).

The miracles in the Scriptures—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.

## **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 Catholic 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 death and Resurrection. Because many rabbis

## **Looking Back** ←

### **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 Catholic Church has a scrupulous process for approving miracles, and many 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)



from Jesus' time warned 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.



In this image of Saint Francis, notice the wounds on his hands, called stigmata. Stigmata appear mysteriously on the hands and feet of people of great holiness, uniting them with the suffering of Christ on the cross. Saint Francis is the first person reported to have experienced stigmata.

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 Catholic 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 church?" 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.

### For Further Reflection

- What is your favorite story about Jesus from the Gospels? Why is this story meaningful to you? What message does this story have about how we should live our lives?
- What do you believe about miracles? Have you ever witnessed an event you consider to be a miracle?
- The chapter started by asking what is your mission in life. How does the idea of sharing in Jesus' mission help you clarify your purpose in life?
- 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 in your home. Compare the lists. What do you learn?
- The chapter makes the claim that Christians need the love and support of other believers to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. How do you experience the love and support of other Christians? How do you give that love and support to other disciples?

## Saintly Profiles

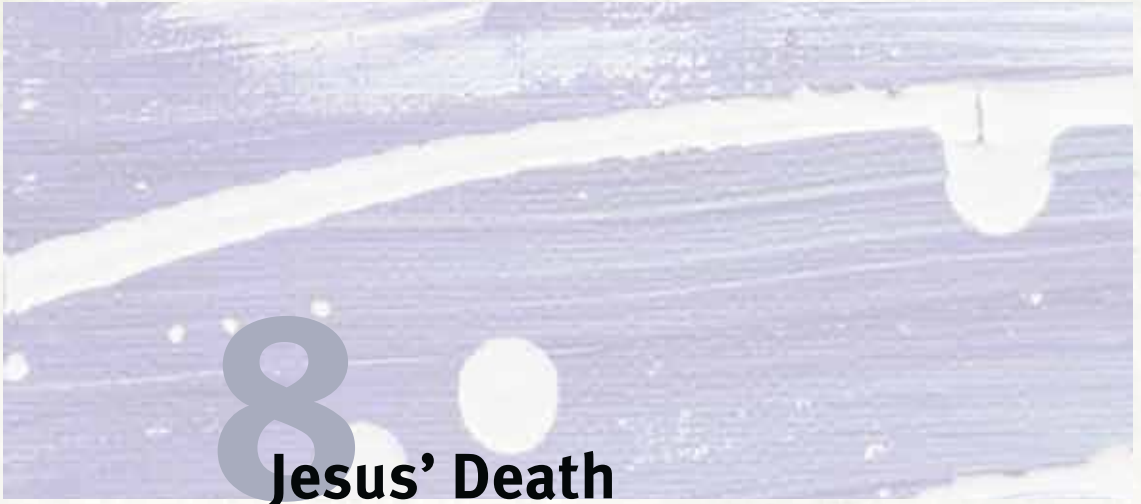
### Saint Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)

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 was devoted to partying 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 that Francis loved the poor and the sick, prayed, preached the Good News, and went about rebuilding the Church one stone at a time. 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.



## 8 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.

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

### Words to Look For

- *Passion*
- *scribes*
- *chief priests*
- *Pharisees*

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?

## 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.

## 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. 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.



- **Luke 16:19–31.** Many of the religious leaders believed that having material wealth was a sign of being right with 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.



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?

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 stories. 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.

The Gospel stories indicate that Pilate did not want to execute Jesus. In the Book of Luke, Pilate even publicly declares Jesus innocent three times. But facing an angry mob, he ultimately gives his 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 this from other writings of the time) have a soft spot in his heart for Jesus?

## 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 stories 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 whip that had pieces of bone and metal embedded in

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)



the leather. It was meant to tear the skin from a person's back. Many people died from this alone. Then, he 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 doubt in part due to the blood he lost from the scourging.



“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).

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.

## **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, or anyone else responsible for Jesus' death was just a puppet, acting without free will. God is master of time and history and can accomplish his purposes through freely made human decisions, even sinful decisions.

And what was God's purpose in the death of Christ? Ever since the sin of Adam and Eve, the human race has been



under the curse of death as the penalty for their sin. Listen to the words of Saint Paul: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). But God would not abandon his beloved creatures to death. He planned that his Son, God himself, would take on the burden of sin for all humanity, dying so that we might be free from the sentence of death. “[Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Salvation from sin and death for every person in every age comes through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Does all this sound too fantastic to believe? Evidently many people living at the time of Jesus thought so. Many of the speeches in the Acts of the Apostles and much of the teaching in the letters of the New Testament are devoted to explaining how Jesus' death frees us from sin. Their teaching tended to fall into three metaphors, or symbolic explanations: Jesus, the suffering servant; Jesus, the Paschal Lamb; and Jesus, the ransom for many. Because the symbols and the Scriptures associated with these metaphors are important in Catholic liturgy and theology, let's look at each one of them.

### Jesus, the Suffering Servant

It is important to remember that the first Christians, like Jesus himself, were Jews. So when they looked for explanations of Jesus' death, it is natural that they looked to their sacred writings, the Jewish Scriptures (which are some of the books in the Christian Old Testament). No doubt they immediately thought of the “suffering servant” passages in Isaiah. You can find these in Isaiah 42:1–4, 49:1–6, 50:4–9, and 52:13–53:12. These passages describe an unnamed servant of the Lord who suffers greatly—not as punishment for his own sins but to save

## Looking Back

### Christ's Suffering

Julian of Norwich, a medieval mystic, was born around 1342. You can find her Saintry Profile in the God the Father chapter. Julian's visions connected the sufferings of Christ with God's tender and infinite love. To Julian, Jesus' willingness to suffer is a sign of his deep compassion and intimate care for us.

At the same time as I saw this sight of the head bleeding, our good Lord showed a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. (*Julian of Norwich: Showings*, long text, chapter 5)

the people from theirs. “He [the suffering servant] was wounded for our transgressions, / crushed for our iniquities; / upon him was the punishment that made us whole, / and by his bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

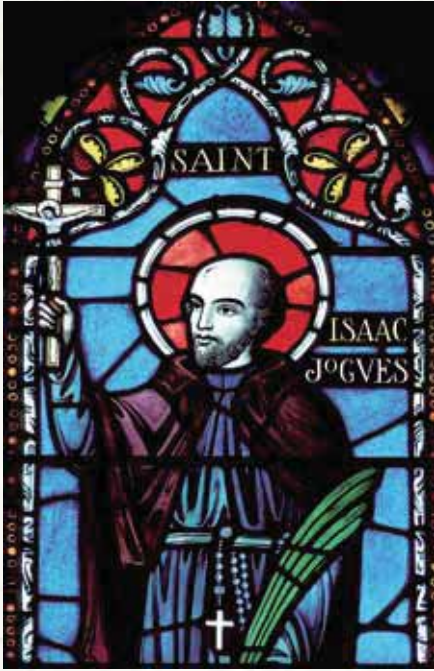
It is easy to see how these passages apply to the suffering and death of Jesus. In making this connection, the early Christians began to understand how Jesus’ freely given obedience to the Father’s will (or plan) was part of the explanation for how we have been freed from our sins. “For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).

### Jesus, the Paschal Lamb

Another story in the Jewish Scriptures that connects to Jesus’ suffering and death is the story of the Paschal, or Passover, Lamb. This story goes all the way back to the time when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. To

convince the Pharaoh to let the people go, God sent a series of ten plagues upon the Egyptian people. The last and most horrible plague was an angel of death that killed the firstborn son of every family in the land. Moses instructed the Israelites to kill a lamb and put its blood on their doorposts so the angel of death would pass over their home without killing the firstborn son. After this Pharaoh let the people go, and they began their journey to the Promised Land.

In the Gospel of John and in the Book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). To make it perfectly clear, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is crucified on the Feast of the Passover, the same day that the Paschal Lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. Just as the blood of the Paschal Lambs liberated the Israelites from death and slavery, so too does Jesus’ death and Resurrection save all humanity from death and from slavery to sin. You will sometimes hear Christians expressing this idea with phrases such as, “I’ve been washed in the blood of the lamb.”



Stained-glass windows in churches often portray saints. This image of Saint Isaac Jogues shows him with a palm branch, which symbolizes his martyrdom. What saints are pictured in your church, and do you know their stories?



## Jesus, the Ransom for Many

In the Roman world, a ransom was the price paid to release a slave. The payment was made in front of a shrine to a local god, to indicate the slave was becoming the property of that god and could no longer be owned by another person. Because they wanted to reach Gentiles (non-Jews), as well as Jews, the early Christians adapted this concept to help explain the saving nature of Jesus' death to Roman citizens. We see this particularly in the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus says, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45). The idea of ransom helps us understand that Jesus paid to God the price of our freedom, so that we are no longer "owned" by sin and death.

All these explanations are important for understanding what Catholics mean when we say that Jesus died for our sins. We must be careful, though, not to interpret them too literally. If you take any of these metaphors to the extreme, God comes off as an angry and cold-hearted accountant, demanding exact payment in blood before setting us free. This is the exact opposite of Jesus' description of God as a loving and forgiving Father. What these three explanations want us to appreciate is that through the death of Jesus Christ, the separation between God and humanity—which is caused by sin—has been bridged. This is God's great gift of love to us, the freely offered sacrifice of God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ.

## What Jesus' Death Means for Us

For Catholics and for all Christians, the death of Jesus Christ is not some abstract teaching or event that happened long ago. It is the ultimate sign of the love of God that is

## Saintly Profiles

### Saint Isaac Jogues

Throughout the history of the Church, Catholics have imitated Jesus' willingness to suffer and die for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This was particularly true for some missionaries who preached the Gospel to people who were hostile to its message. Isaac Jogues was one of those people. Born in Orléans, France, in 1607, he became a Jesuit and was ordained to the priesthood. He was sent as a missionary to the Hurons in Canada. The Huron tribe was open to the Christian message, and many were baptized into the Catholic faith. But the Huron's enemy, the Mohawk tribe, was not as open. Isaac Jogues and his traveling companions were captured by Mohawks and tortured. His lay assistant was killed. Isaac Jogues was made a slave to the chief, and was later freed by Dutch traders who eventually returned him to France.

In 1644 Isaac Jogues returned to Canada and attended a peace conference between the Iroquois federation and the French. He was chosen as an envoy to the Mohawks to secure their approval of the peace treaty, which he accomplished. On his return to Quebec, he requested and received permission to go back to the Mohawks as a missionary. On the journey there he was captured again by the Mohawks, who thought the gifts he had left for them on his previous visit were responsible for a crop failure and an epidemic. This time he was tortured and killed. Several other Jesuit missionaries were also martyred during those early years, and together with Isaac Jogues, they are known as the North American Martyrs, the patron saints of North America. Their feast day is October 19.



available to each person who puts faith and trust in God. The cross, the symbol of death, has been transformed into the symbol of freedom and life! Why else would we wear and display a symbol of public execution? (Think about it, wearing a cross is kind of like wearing a small model of an electric chair.) Catholics display crucifixes—crosses with the tortured body of Jesus—to remind us visually of the great love God has for us. The words of Saint Paul say it best:

## Pray It

### The Triduum

The holiest days of the year for Catholics are the days of the Easter Triduum. Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Day for us are inextricably linked. Jesus' suffering and death do not stand alone but find the fullness of meaning when placed in the context of the Last Supper and the Resurrection. As early as the fourth century, Christians had an understanding of these days as connected to one another. On Good Friday the celebration of the Lord's Passion—which comprises a Liturgy of the Word, veneration of the cross, and the distribution of Holy Communion—helps us meditate on Jesus' suffering. We are not meant to meditate in morbid sorrow but to always remember that Jesus' suffering and death mean love, salvation, and hope.

At the veneration the priest or deacon announces three times: "Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world."

And we respond: "Come, let us adore" (*Roman Missal*).

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5:6–11)

### For Further Reflection

- Read one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death (Matthew 26:1—27:66, Mark 14:1—15:47, Luke 22:1—23:56, John 18:1—19:42). What thoughts and feelings do you have? What inspires you?
- Catholics remember the sacrifice of Jesus every time we celebrate the Mass. The next time you attend Mass, watch for words or actions that remind you of the three metaphors—the suffering servant, the Paschal Lamb, or the ransom for many—used to explain the reason for Jesus' death.



# 9

## Jesus' Resurrection

Would the story of Cinderella be so well known if the prince hadn't noticed Cinderella at the last minute and had her try on the glass slipper? Or would episode IV of *Star Wars* have been much of a movie if Luke Skywalker had missed the tiny, little vent with his final shot and failed to blow up the Death Star? Would you believe that these fictional stories, like so many others, are rooted in the greatest true story of all time: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

As human beings we have a deep desire to see the forces of life conquer those of death, especially in the darkest and most hopeless of times. We have this desire in us because in God's plan, we are not destined for death but for eternal life. Through the life, death, and **Resurrection** of Jesus Christ, all humanity has an opportunity to share in the eternal life God has planned for us from the beginning of time.

This is why Christ's Resurrection is the single most important event in all history. Saint Paul says it bluntly, "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

### Words to Look For

- *Resurrection*
- *Paschal Mystery*
- *Ascension*



Without the Resurrection of Christ, the Gospels would never have been written and the Catholic Church would never have existed.



When Jesus appears to two disciples walking to Emmaus, in Luke 24:13–35, they do not recognize him. Then when he blesses and breaks the bread for their meal, as depicted in this painting, they suddenly recognize him as the risen Christ. When have you unexpectedly encountered Jesus?

Let's bring this to a personal level. The most important question you will ever face is this: "Do I believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead?" Why? Because how you answer that question will determine how seriously you live out your belief in Jesus. If you answer, "I believe in the Resurrection!" how can you not make Jesus Christ the center of your life?

## **The Gospel Accounts**

Each of the four Gospels has a slightly different account of what happened in the days after Jesus' death. The Gospel of Mark offers the fewest clues; it originally ended with several women discovering an empty tomb and an angel telling the women that Jesus had been raised. (A longer ending was later added to the Gospel, in which Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and the other disciples.) In the Gospel of Matthew, Pilate places a guard at the tomb to keep the disciples from stealing Jesus' body, but an angel rolls away the stone anyway. The resurrected Jesus meets the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, where he gives them a mission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The Gospel of John takes the prize for the most Resurrection stories, with four separate accounts of Jesus appearing to different people.

Despite their differences, the Gospel stories have these points in common:

- First the women disciples, and then the men, go to the tomb and discover that the body of Jesus is no longer there.
- The people who go to the tomb find out from angels that Jesus is no longer dead but alive and will reveal himself to the disciples soon. (In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals himself to Mary Magdalene at the tomb.)
- Later Jesus appears to groups of disciples to wish them peace and charge them with continuing his mission. Often the disciples' initial reaction is shock and fear. But soon they experience Jesus in such striking ways that they cannot doubt



that it is he—alive again, and yet somehow different from the way he was before his death.

The thing that most people want to know is, “What was the resurrected Jesus like?” The fact that the Gospel accounts are purposefully vague gives us one clue: the resurrected Jesus couldn’t easily be explained in human terms. He shows up without warning and disappears just as suddenly. The disciples know he’s not a ghost because he can be touched and he eats with them. He’s different enough that some people do not recognize him immediately, yet when they do recognize him, he’s still the same person they knew from before. Being in his risen presence gives them peace and hope.

Because of these things, the Church teaches that a resurrected body is not a reanimated corpse. Jesus was truly transformed by the Resurrection, just as we will be after our death. We will still be the same person, but we will have a resurrected body in an utterly new kind of existence. Beyond that we cannot say much more, but we can trust that it will be truly glorious and wonderful!

## Evidence for the Resurrection

But how do we know that the Gospel accounts are all true? What if the Gospel writers simply made it all up? This is a valid question that we must meet head-on if we are to be honest about what we believe. You will find that, just like when trying to prove the existence of God, there are good arguments to show that it is reasonable to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus as an actual historical event. Let’s explore some of those arguments.

One argument is that we can trust the historical validity of the New Testament

LIVE!  
it!

## A Personal Experience of Resurrection

Lisa Boyer is a young adult whose journey to Confirmation was an experience of resurrection. She tells her story in her own words:

The death of my beloved brother Jason in a car accident so devastated me that for a time I prayed that God would take me too. I saw my parents in agony, and Jason, my best friend, who had always lent me strength, was gone. I felt my soul had been damaged beyond repair. I began to question God. How could God take a man with his whole life ahead of him? How was it possible that my mother’s loving God existed when God showed me so little mercy?

In July 2001 I made a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. The tears I had been unable to cry for Jason almost two years before came so easily as I lit a candle for him and first felt the promise of peace. I knew I must heal my relationship with God.

That fall I began the RCIA program so I could receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. I found that my anger and pain began to melt away. Then as I knelt during the third scrutiny ceremony in Lent, I felt the power of the Holy Spirit lift me up. At that moment I knew that through all those hard times, the Lord had gotten me through, when I had neither the strength nor desire to go on.

Now it really feels like I am a new person. I feel unbelievable peace and joy and hope for my future.

books and letters. Although we do not have original copies of the New Testament books or letters, we have copies that can be traced back to within a few centuries of Jesus' earthly life.

And we have lots of different ancient copies of the New Testament books and letters coming from different locations. When historians take these things into account, we have greater proof for the authenticity of the New Testament books than for any other ancient writing.

Another argument is that the Resurrection was a consistent belief in the early Church. You can find it in all four Gospels, in the letters of Saint Paul, and in the speeches contained in the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, experiencing the risen Jesus was considered a key qualification for being accepted as one of the Apostles (see Acts of the Apostles 1:15–22). This is clear evidence that the earliest Christians accepted it as a matter of fact.

There is also the argument of the empty tomb. If the tomb was not empty, surely the Romans or the Jewish religious leaders would have produced the corpse to rest the rumors of Jesus' Resurrection right away. No evidence has been found that they tried to do this. But you might ask, "Couldn't the disciples have stolen Jesus' corpse and then claimed that he had risen?" The problem with this argument is that several of the disciples died as martyrs rather than deny their faith in the resurrected Jesus. Why would they have chosen to die for a hoax if they knew that Jesus had not really risen?

And we can argue that the Resurrection appearances of Jesus caused a profound change in his followers. This may be the most important evidence of all. After Jesus' death his disciples were beaten, discouraged, and afraid for their lives. Yet somehow they found the courage to go out in public and continue Jesus' mission, facing ridicule, persecution, and even death. They preached with total conviction that Jesus had risen. What other reasonable explanation could there be for this change than their encounter with the risen Christ?

No one can provide you with scientific evidence supporting Jesus' Resurrection. The Resurrection was not a histori-



This thirteenth-century painting depicts Christ descending into hell to free those righteous people who had died before his Resurrection. Notice the broken door and the Devil below Christ's feet—symbols of Christ's power over hell and death.



cal event in the same sense that Jesus' death was. Everyone, whether or not they believed that Jesus was the Son of God, could see his dead body. But only those who had faith in Jesus experienced him in his resurrected body (except the Apostle Paul, who was a special case). But these arguments are convincing in showing that it is reasonable for good, intelligent people to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus.

## The Religious Meaning of the Resurrection

As was said at the beginning of this chapter, the religious meaning of the Resurrection is huge for Christians. To repeat Saint Paul, "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain." The following are three important things we know because of the Resurrection.

### Jesus Is Confirmed as the Son of God

For the first disciples, seeing the resurrected Jesus was clear proof that Jesus was more than just another human being. The story of doubting Thomas says it most clearly. When Thomas sees the resurrected Jesus for the first time, he declares, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Belief in Jesus' Resurrection and belief in the Incarnation go hand in hand. Throughout the centuries people have believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ because they first believed in his Resurrection.

### All Jesus' Teachings Are True

If the Resurrection reveals the truth of Jesus' divinity, then it also reveals that all his other teachings are true, too. If we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, how can we not also believe that Jesus spoke the truth as follows:

- in claiming that God's love for us has no limits
- in claiming that we only find fulfillment first by loving and

## Did You Know?

### "He Descended into Hell"

The phrase "He descended into hell" first means that Jesus experienced death as completely as we do. He too experienced the complete loss of physical life that comes with death. Second, it means that after his death, Jesus went to the realm of the dead, where the souls of all those who had died before him awaited his judgment. Those who were righteous were brought into heaven, and the unrighteous were condemned to remain in hell, separated from God for all eternity. By descending into hell, Jesus completely established his power over all creation—on earth, in heaven, and in hell.



- serving God and second by loving and serving others
- in claiming that forgiveness is more powerful and Godlike than revenge
  - in teaching that the rich must share with the poor
  - in teaching that we must refuse to accept the human-made prejudices that separate us from one another



In this detail from a larger painting, Mary Magdalene clings to the foot of Jesus' cross. Her presence at the cross when many of the other disciples have already fled is a sign of her courage and her devotion to Christ.

The Resurrection is a guarantee that all these things—and many other things Jesus taught that are not on this list—are true beyond a doubt.

### **The Paschal Mystery**

Finally and wonderfully, the Resurrection teaches us that death is not the end; death is the doorway into new and eternal life. The life that we now live is not all there is, as some people claim. The sufferings and the pain of this life can be endured because we know that something better and glorious is yet to come. When we believe in Jesus Christ and in his Resurrection, our whole way of life is transformed. Who would not want to live this life so that we are ready to enter into the glory of heaven, where:

He will dwell with them as their God;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

(Revelation 21:3–4)

The Church calls this—the mystery that Christ had to suffer and die to save us from sin and death and to raise us with him to new and glorious life—the **Paschal Mystery**. In the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, Jesus is compared to the Paschal Lamb. Just as the Paschal Lamb had to die to save the Israelite people from death in the first Passover, now Jesus saves us all from death in the new Passover.

The Paschal Mystery applies to our lives right now. We don't have to wait until our final death to experience new life. Throughout our lives we experience big and little “deaths” in

a variety of ways. These deaths might be through the suffering caused by illness, the emotional loss of a good friend who moves away, the heartache of failing to make the team, or the anger and hurt caused by divorce. The Paschal Mystery promises that if we maintain our faith in God during these times, God can make something life-giving come out of our pain and loss.

If you listen to faithful Christians for a while, you will hear story after story about how God helped them see or experience something good and wonderful during difficult times. Although this life will never be free of suffering and pain, we don't have to wait until heaven to experience the joy God wants us have. Consider these inspiring words from the First Letter of Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. . . . In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1:3–7)

## Jesus' Ascension

Another dramatic event in the life of Jesus occurs after the Resurrection. It is captured in this phrase of the Nicene Creed: "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." The Gospel authors had a hard time putting this event into words. Matthew and John do not mention it at all.

## Saintly Profiles

### Saint Mary Magdalene

Mary of Magdala (Magdalene indicates she was from the town of Magdala) is among the first and greatest saints who lived in the company of Jesus. Yet she came from a very troubled past. We are told that Jesus cast out seven demons from her (see Mark 16:9, Luke 8:2), suggesting she had suffered from severe physical and emotional illnesses. After her healing she became part of the influential group of women disciples who traveled with Jesus (see Luke 8:1–2, Mark 15:40–41). She likely had a leadership role among them because her name is first in the lists of women.

Mary Magdalene had courage. She was present at the cross when most of the men who followed Jesus had all run away. In the Resurrection accounts, it is she rather than Peter who is the first to see the empty tomb. Jesus chose to appear to her first, and he sent her to tell the Good News to the others (see Matthew 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–10, Luke 24:1–12, John 20:1–18). We see in the Bible how she rose from the shadows of society to great stature in the Christian community.

Unfortunately Mary Magdalene's image has been distorted through the centuries. She has been equated wrongly with the reformed prostitute of Luke, chapter 7. Have you ever felt like you were in the shadows or that people had the wrong image of you? Let Mary Magdalene inspire you to rise above it! Her feast day is July 22.



In Mark it simply says, “So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God” (16:19). Luke says, “While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven” (24:51). The author of Luke continues with a slightly longer version of the **Ascension** at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (see 1:6–12).

## Looking Back

### Saint Augustine on Resurrection

Saint Augustine (AD 354–430) was a bishop and a doctor of the Church. You can read more about him in chapter 5, “The Human Person.” Here is an excerpt from a homily he directed to those who had been baptized at the Easter Vigil:

You have been buried with Christ by baptism into death in order that, as Christ has risen from the dead, you also may walk in newness of life. . . . When the Lord rose from the dead, he put off the mortality of the flesh; his risen body was still the same body, but it was no longer subject to death. . . .

And so your own hope of resurrection, though not yet realized, is sure and certain, because you have received the Sacrament or sign of this reality, and have been given the pledge of the Spirit. . . . When Christ, your life, appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

*(The Liturgy of the Hours, volume 2, pages 635–637)*

These Gospel accounts are trying to describe an event that is beyond human comprehension. Many people in the ancient world believed that a layer of water covered the sky and was the physical boundary of the universe. Once you got past those waters, you were in heaven. So it made sense to think that if Jesus were joining his Father in heaven, he would have to rise into the sky and travel past the waters.

Today we know that there is no layer of water over the sky and that heaven doesn’t lie just outside our atmosphere. However, that doesn’t change the reality the Gospel writers were trying to address: that after spending time with some of his faithful followers after his Resurrection, Jesus left this world to be with his Father in heaven. What does this mean for the human race?

First, it means that all humanity now has the possibility of spending eternity with God in heaven. After his Ascension into heaven, Jesus remains fully God and fully man—he did not give up his human nature even though his mission had been accomplished. By honoring our humanity, Christ has opened the doors to heaven for us all,

overcoming the final barriers separating humanity from God. In heaven Jesus’ resurrected body assumed its full glory, as will ours.

Second, it means that in a strangely paradoxical way, Jesus can be more present to us now than before his Ascension. Before his final Ascension, Jesus was still somehow limited by



time and space. This seems to be indicated by Jesus' mysterious words to Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17). After his Ascension Jesus is no longer limited to being in one place at one particular time. He is free to be everywhere, with everyone, for all time! This is the amazing meaning of the Ascension.

### For Further Reflection

- Read one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' Resurrection (Matthew 26:1—27:66, Mark 14:1—15:47, Luke 22:1—23:56, John 18:1—19:42). What thoughts and feelings do you have? What inspires you?
- The Paschal Mystery is the reality that for those with faith, God can bring new life from death. How have you experienced something good and positive from a situation that started out as negative and painful?
- What reasons for believing in Jesus' Resurrection would you give to someone who is struggling to believe that it really happened?
- How does your belief in the Resurrection of Christ affect your other beliefs, your attitudes, and your actions?

## Pray It

### Easter Vigil: Light in the Darkness

The Easter Vigil Mass is the Church's biggest and most important liturgical event. It begins in the darkness of Holy Saturday evening, at the fire where the new Easter candle is lit. During the procession into the dark Church, all the members of the congregation light candles to symbolize the light of Christ that overcomes sin and darkness. Then we hear the Easter proclamation:

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,  
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,  
let the trumpet of salvation sound aloud our mighty King's triumph! . . .  
This is the night  
when Christ broke the prison-bars of death  
and rose victorious from the underworld. . . .  
On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,  
accept this candle, a solemn offering,  
Therefore, O Lord,  
we pray you that this candle, . . .  
may . . . overcome the darkness of this night.

The Vigil continues with the Liturgy of the Word, followed by the Baptism and Confirmation of the those who are being initiated into the Church. Then the whole community joins the newly initiated in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Meditate on the power of this Vigil Mass. Light your own "Easter candle" in a darkened room in your home or with your peers. Pray the words from the Easter proclamation above and let them fill your mind and heart with the joy and power of the Resurrection. Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! Amen.



# 10 The Holy Spirit

Things change; that's simply a fact of life. But not all change is good, which is why the Catholic Church is very careful about changing its language and practices. The Church makes changes not to stay trendy but to better serve the mission of Jesus. And of course the Church cannot change the teachings that have been revealed by God through the Scriptures and Tradition. So the Church makes a change in its language or practice only after a great deal of consideration and prayer.

When the Church changed the English-language name of the third person of the Trinity from Holy Ghost to Holy Spirit (back in the 1960s), people took notice. Your grandparents probably remember this. Why "Spirit" instead of "Ghost"? The answer has to do with the changing meaning of words. In previous centuries *ghost* meant a spirit without a physical body. But in more modern times, due to the influence of books and movies, the word *ghost* came to mean a dead person that frightened you. And the Holy Spirit is nothing to be frightened of.

## Words to Look For

- *Pentecost*
- *gifts of the Holy Spirit*
- *fruits of the Holy Spirit*



On the contrary, we have no greater supporter and helper in our lives than the Holy Spirit.

## The Holy Spirit's Mission

We talk a lot about God the Father and Jesus the Son. But rarely do you hear people talk as much about the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Just like God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is part of everything that God is and does. Starting at the very beginning of creation, we read, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1–2). The Hebrew word for wind is *ruah*, which also means “breath” or “spirit.” So the verse could also be understood as “the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.” Thus we know that the Holy Spirit was active in the creation of the universe.

Catholics also believe that the Holy Spirit was at work throughout the history of the Jewish people. But you will rarely find the Spirit specifically named in the Old Testament books. You will find, however, a number of references to the “spirit of God” in the Old Testament. The Jewish people closely associated the Spirit of God with prophecy (for example, see 2 Chronicles 15:1 or Ezekiel 11:24), believing that God spoke through the prophets who spoke in his name. The Church believes that these Old Testament passages are early references to the work of the Holy Spirit.

When we move to the New Testament, we find that the Gospels still contain few references to the Holy Spirit—except for the Gospel of Luke, which is sometimes called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. In Luke the Holy Spirit fills John the Baptist at his birth (see 1:15), and it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is conceived in Mary (see 1:35). The Holy Spirit fills Elizabeth (see 1:41) and Simeon (see 2:25), so that they recognize the specialness of the infant Jesus. The Holy



This stained-glass window from a Catholic church in California shows the Holy Spirit showering his gifts upon the world. Notice the use of symbolic numbers: three rays of light, seven tongues of fire. In Church teaching, what is special about those numbers?



Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism (see 3:22), and fills him after his time in the desert (see 4:1). And this is just in the first four chapters!

## Looking Back

### Catholic Charismatics

A number of Catholics throughout the world participate in a movement called the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. This movement, which began in 1967 at Duquesne University, in Pittsburgh, takes its name from the word *charism*, meaning “gift.” Charismatics speak of being “baptized in the Holy Spirit,” which is an experience of being reawakened to the activity of the Spirit in their lives. This awakening helps them to become more open to receiving the gifts of the Spirit. The primary activity of charismatic groups is prayer, which takes many forms, including praying in tongues.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops affirmed the contribution of this movement to the Church:

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal has brought personal spiritual renewal to the lives of millions of priests, deacons, religious, and lay Catholics. It has called countless alienated Catholics to reconciliation with the Lord and with the Church. It has deepened a love for Jesus and the Church among young people as well as so many others, including the unchurched. (*Grace for the New Springtime*, 1997)

In all four Gospels, John the Baptist prophesies that Jesus will baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove. And in the Gospel of John’s account of the Last Supper, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to guide the disciples after he leaves them:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. . . . The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. (14:16–17,26)

These passages teach us that wherever God sends his Son, he also sends his Spirit. Jesus and the Holy Spirit share the same mission, and their work cannot be separated. However, the Holy Spirit’s mission is never to draw attention to himself but rather to reveal God the Father and Jesus the Son. For the most part, the significant, ongoing work of the Holy Spirit remained hidden until Jesus ascended into heaven. (*Note:* Although we traditionally use masculine pronouns when referring to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is neither male nor female.)

### The Holy Spirit and Pentecost

The most dramatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures is recorded at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus had ascended into heaven, and