

*The **Catholic** **Connections** **Handbook*** *for Middle Schoolers*

Second Edition

Janet Claussen
Pat Finan
Diana Macalintal
Jerry Shepherd
Brian Singer-Towns
Susan Stark
Chris Wardwell

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



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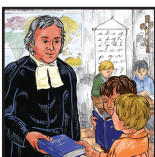
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INTRODUCTION

Come with Me

“Come with me” (Matthew 4:19). Jesus said this to his first disciples, and it is his message to us today. Following Jesus is at the heart of being Catholic. Even though following Jesus isn’t always easy, it’s the most fulfilling and meaningful way to live life.

The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers is a guide for young teens on what it means to follow Jesus and to be Catholic today. This handbook offers a summary of what God has revealed to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, and what the Church has passed on from generation to generation through the working of the Holy Spirit. The handbook is a companion to the Bible and aims to help you learn about God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Sacraments, Christian morality and justice, and prayer.

Study It!

This handbook is divided into the following four sections, according to the four pillars, or parts, of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Each a different color so you can more easily find the part you are looking for:

Part 1: The Creed

Part 2: Liturgy and Sacraments

Part 3: Christian Morality and Justice

Part 4: Prayer

The handbook is a great tool for study, but it is more than that. It includes many prayers and excellent guidance for living the Catholic faith.

Each of the handbook's fifty chapters has a number of special features. These are short articles set in special boxes. Along with the main text in the chapters, these articles are intended to help you further study, pray, and live the Catholic faith. Following are descriptions of the special articles you'll see throughout the handbook.



PRAY IT!

Faith becomes more alive through prayer. In each chapter you'll see a short prayer just right for times when you are by yourself or when you are with a group of peers.



Did You Know?

The many Did You Know? articles take topics from the chapter they appear in and explore them in more depth.



FUN FACT

The Fun Fact articles in every chapter are brief notes designed to provide instructive and entertaining information.



LITURGY CONNECTION

Faith is celebrated in the Church's liturgy and Sacraments. The Liturgy Connection articles will help you see the relationship between Catholic beliefs and worship.



CHURCH HISTORY

Sometimes a little history provides a better understanding of aspects of Catholic beliefs and practices. The Church History articles appear occasionally to provide you with this type of historical insight.



THINK ABOUT IT!

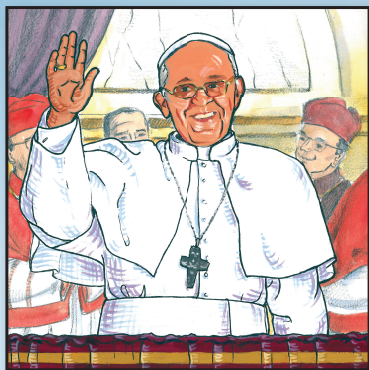
Every chapter has a Think About It! article with a topic or questions for you to ponder on your own or to discuss with your friends or family members.



LIVE IT!

Being Catholic has to do with beliefs, but it also has to do with the way you live. The Live It! articles suggest ways you can put your faith into action.

PEOPLE OF FAITH



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This handbook introduces you to, or reacquaints you with, approximately twenty-five of the many people who have strengthened the Church and inspired others with their faith.

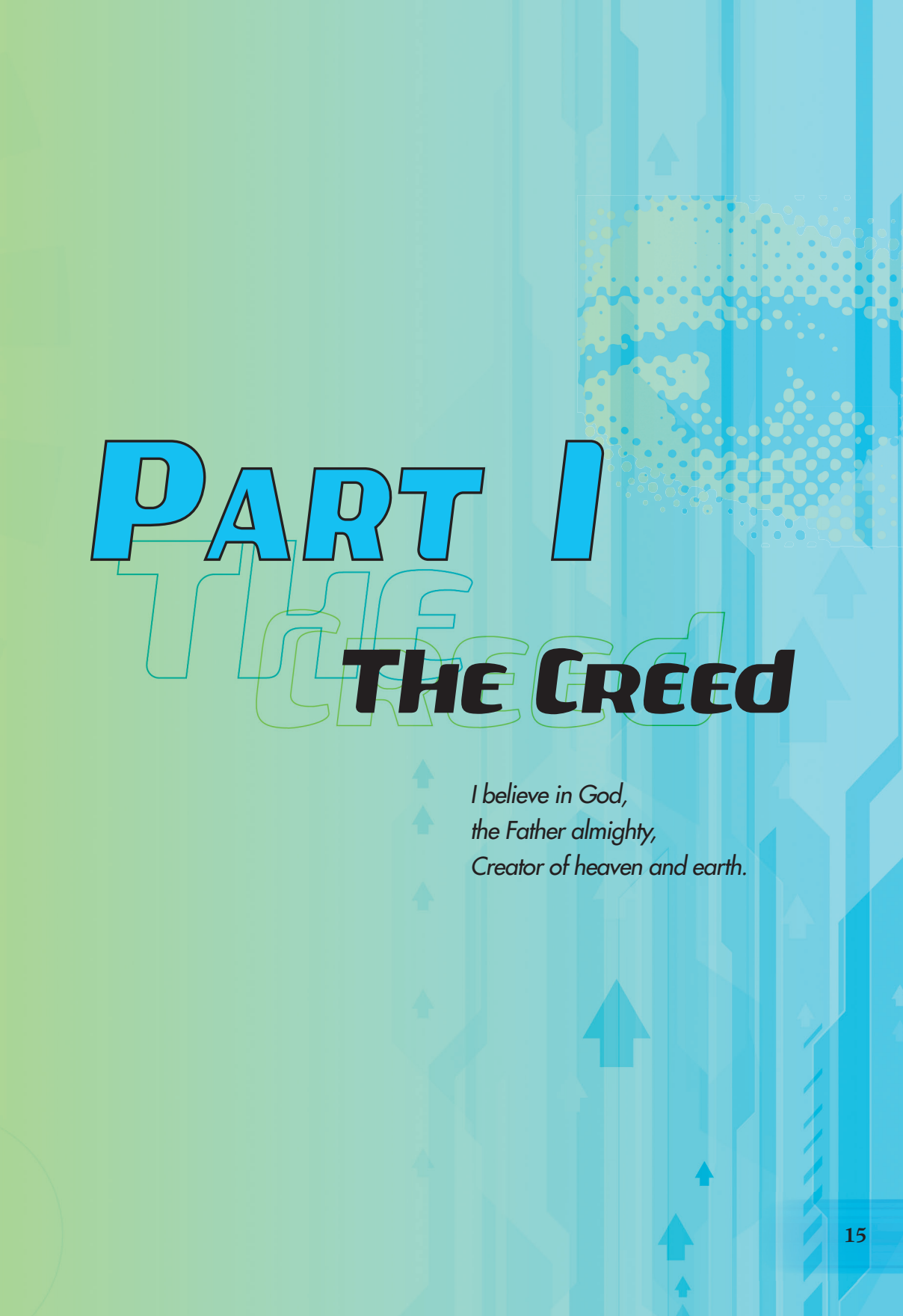
Catholic Prayers, Beliefs and Practices, and Key Words

Several handy sections at the end of the handbook provide the following easy-to-access information:

- a collection of Catholic prayers
- a brief summary of core Catholic beliefs and practices
- a glossary of the handbook's key words

The authors and everyone at Saint Mary's Press who had a hand in creating this book wish you many blessings as you use it to explore more deeply what it means to follow Jesus and to be a member of the Catholic Church.





PART I

THE CREED

*I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.*

1 REVELATION, SACRED SCRIPTURE, AND SACRED TRADITION

KEY WORDS

Revelation
Sacred Scripture
Gospels
Inspiration
Sacred Tradition

In the beginning God created the world. A powerful hand shows God's role in the creation of the universe.



© Mike Agliolo/Corbis

It's Saturday morning. You wake up, turn on the TV, and start flipping through the channels. On the way to your favorite show, you find a preacher on one channel. He explains that the Creation story in the Bible happened just as it is written in the Bible. He insists that the world was created in only six days and that this should be taught in schools. Later that day, in the grocery store checkout line, you see a magazine cover that tells why scientists support the idea that our universe began billions of years ago in a huge explosion. Inside, another article talks about how apes slowly changed over time to become human beings.

At school on Monday, you find out that your newest friend at school is an atheist—someone who doesn't believe in God. His mother has told him that people made up the idea of God so they wouldn't feel bad.

All these different ideas make you wonder about the things you have been taught about God. How can you know the truth?

Revelation

One place where you can begin to look for answers is under your own two feet. The earth itself is a sign of God's existence. In fact, you can find the evidence of God's handiwork everywhere: the trees that give you shade, the sun that warms your back, the dogs that bark in the distance, and, of course, all the people around you. Though we do not fully understand God and his ways, we can use our minds to see that God truly exists because of the wonder of creation itself.

In fact, throughout all history, God has made himself known to human beings in a number of ways. He continues to do so today through the signs of creation around us, through the voice of the Church, and through the voices of our consciences speaking from within us. You may already have had an experience where God became known to you. Maybe after going to confession, you have felt the relief of having God remove the burden of your guilty feelings and your sins. Maybe you have felt God's presence in the prayerful quiet of the church before Mass. If anything like this has ever happened to you, you know it comes as a gift. God makes himself



PRAY IT!

Lord God, I ask,
When I . . .

- . . . am lost, make yourself known to me.
- . . . am lonely, make yourself known to me.
- . . . am confused, make yourself known to me.
- . . . am sick, make yourself known to me.
- . . . am joyful, make yourself known to me.
- . . . doubt you, make yourself known to me.
- . . . am in need, make yourself known to me.
- . . . pray, make yourself known to me.

Amen.



FUN FACT

Did you know that the Catholic Bible contains seven books that are not part of the Protestant Bible? The Old Testament books of Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch are excluded from Protestant Bibles, but because these books are all inspired by the Holy Spirit, they are included in all Catholic Bibles.

known to us because he loves us. Even more amazing, he wants to give himself to us so we know that we are never alone.

What God has made known about himself and his plan for humanity is called **Revelation**. Throughout history God's Revelation has been made known through his creation, through events, and through other people; it is most especially and fully made known through Jesus Christ. Though it is certainly possible for one to have a personal experience of God, Revelation is communicated to the whole world in two main ways: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Scripture and Tradition are distinct, yet very closely related. Both communicate or transmit the Word of God. Scripture and Tradition make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God,



Did You Know?

The Case of the "Missing" Gospels

From time to time, in the newspaper or in other news media, you might hear about a newly discovered "gospel" that somehow mysteriously never made it into the Bible. Often, these reports suggest that these books were deliberately left out of the Bible as a way to hide a secret the Church doesn't want us to know. Actually the truth is far less dramatic: early in the Church's history, some writings (or books) were considered misleading or incomplete or just did not express the true faith of the Church, and were therefore not accepted by the Church Fathers as part of Sacred Scripture.

and have been given to the Church to be safeguarded and passed on so that all generations will know God's Revelation. The Church, in her teachings, life, and worship, transmits to every generation what God has revealed through Scripture and Tradition.

God fully revealed himself by sending his only Son, Jesus Christ. There is nothing new that God needs to reveal until Christ comes again to establish a new Heaven and a new earth. But what the Father revealed through his Son needs to be explained and taught to all people. Teaching what God has revealed through Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture became the responsibility of the Apostles and their successors, the popes and bishops of the Church.

Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture is the seventy-three divinely inspired books we recognize as the Word of God. Another name for Sacred Scripture is the Bible. The seventy-three books of the Bible include the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. God is the ultimate author of the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors to communicate what God wants us to know for our salvation.

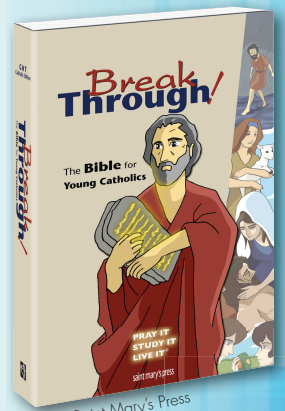
Four special books in the New Testament are called the **Gospels**. The word *gospel* means "good news." The Gospels are special because they tell us



Think About It!

Sometimes people say God speaks to them. If you were to ask them, though, whether they hear voices in their heads, they would probably say, "Of course not! I'm not crazy!" How does God communicate with us without using an actual voice? What are some ways God might make his will known to us?

The Bible helps us discover who God is and how he relates to us. Do you make time to read the Bible?



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LITURGY CONNECTION

The Liturgy of the Word

We listen to God's Revelation every time we go to Mass.

When we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word (the part of Mass when the Word of God is proclaimed), God is revealed to us in a special way.

In the Scripture readings, we hear about what God has done for our salvation.

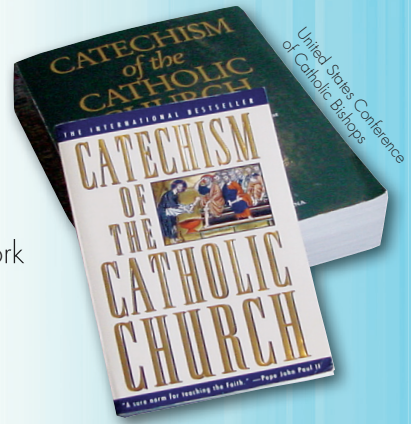
We listen to how God led Moses and the Israelites out of slavery, how the prophets reminded the people of their promise to be faithful to God, about what Jesus taught and did, about the events of Jesus' Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, and about how the early Christians carried on Christ's mission. In all the readings from Sacred Scripture, God is revealed to be all powerful, all loving, and all forgiving, always caring for his people, no matter what.

about the life, teachings, Passion (suffering), death, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whom God's Revelation is complete.

Although the Bible often contains accurate scientific facts and history, we must be careful in looking for that kind of information. God did not give us the Bible as a source of information about scientific or historical events; rather, he gave us the words of Sacred Scripture to share with us the truths that will bring us our salvation. God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors. The Holy Spirit guided the Bible's authors to record without error what God wants us to know for our salvation. This is called **Inspiration**.

Remember that even though the Holy Spirit guided these writers, they were still human beings. They wrote in ancient languages and lived in cultures different from ours. Just like us, they had an incomplete understanding of the world. Because of this, the meaning of the words of the Bible is not always readily apparent. The Pope and our bishops provide the Church with the authentic interpretation of the Bible. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they teach us about God's message of salvation as revealed through the inspired writers of

the Bible. The Church is assisted in this work by biblical scholars, who study the Bible closely to find out exactly what its human authors intended to say. Biblical scholars must always follow the guidance of the Church and ensure that their work reflects the unity of all Church teachings.



Sacred Tradition

To fully learn the truths God wants to reveal to us for our salvation, we must look to Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. **Sacred Tradition** is based on a word meaning “to hand on.” So, Tradition means both the central beliefs of our faith and the way in which that content has been handed down through the centuries under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This handbook is based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a summary of the central teachings of our Tradition. Read the handbook along with your Bible to discover who God is.



LIVE IT!

Be a Prophet

Prophets are people who speak God’s Word. In the Bible, the prophets reveal God’s will to the people. Jesus Christ is the Word Made flesh, the ultimate prophet who was sent by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, we are anointed to share in Christ’s prophetic ministry. We are all called to be prophets in some way. We are all called to speak God’s Word.

That doesn’t mean we have to preach on street corners, but it does mean our words and actions should reveal the faith we claim as our own. If someone were to follow you around for a day, would he or she be able to see God in the way you interact with your classmates? If it were illegal to be a Catholic, how many of us would be found guilty?

Tradition is not the same thing as tradition with a lowercase *t*. You probably take part in a number of traditions. They might include things like your family eating a certain kind of pie every year for your Thanksgiving meal, or everyone at school wearing the school colors to all the sporting events. The Church's Tradition has some things in common with these, but it is still different.

Sacred Tradition started with the preaching of the Apostles. Although some of this preaching was written down in the Bible, the Bible does not contain all of Sacred Tradition. Tradition includes our belief in the Trinity, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Seven Sacraments, and many other matters revealed through the teachings of the Pope and bishops under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, God actively leads us to salvation.



Did You Know?

The Flat Earth Under the Dome

The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the Bible, but they still had the same mistaken ideas about the earth as everyone else during the times they lived. For example, when the Book of Genesis was written, people believed the world was flat and covered by a giant dome. They believed water surrounded the dome. When the Creation accounts were written, this incorrect scientific information was described. Whether the earth is as flat as a pancake or as round as a ball is not important when it comes to our salvation. What is important is that God created everything in the world out of love for us. That truth is part of God's Revelation.

God's Mystery

Although God does make himself known to us, we cannot expect to fully understand all of his ways. We can come to know a lot about God, but our human understanding cannot completely grasp him.

The Book of Job tells the story of a man named Job. Job was trying to understand why bad things were happening to him. At the end of the story, God asks him questions that no one but God could answer (see Job, chapter 38). Job then realizes something important. Even if we stand face-to-face with God, we will still never be able to understand some things about him (see 42:1–6).



CHURCH HISTORY

Scripture, Tradition, and the Ecumenical Councils

In the early 1500s, a German priest named Martin Luther began to teach that the Bible was the only necessary source of truth. Shortly afterward all the bishops in the world gathered at the Council of Trent (1543–1565), in Italy, to respond to Luther's ideas. At the Council of Trent, the Pope and the bishops affirmed that both Scripture and Tradition are necessary ways of passing on, or transmitting, God's Revelation.

Ecumenical Councils such as the Second Vatican Council are official meetings of all the world's Catholic bishops with the approval of the Pope. These councils are how the Church addresses important issues or questions that come up from time to time. The councils do not occur often. In fact, throughout the entire history of the Church, there have been only twenty-one Ecumenical Councils.

2 ***THE BIBLE: GOD'S PLAN FOR SALVATION***

KEY WORDS

salvation history

covenant

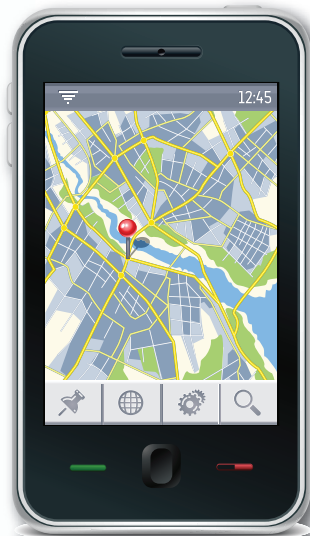
Exodus

Exile

Gentiles

Are you looking forward to learning how to drive? Driving is a lot of fun, but it requires learning new physical and mental skills, such as following directions to get from one place to another. Most people use printed maps or get driving directions on a GPS unit or smart-phone. However you do it, you need to know two things for sure: your starting address and the address of your destination. Without knowing both, you can spend hours driving in circles.

Have you ever gotten wrong directions from your phone or computer? God's directions never mislead us. Even when we choose to ignore God, he always guides us back to the right path.



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Through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, God has given us a roadmap with directions for our life. If we follow God's roadmap, at the end of our life we will reach the destination he has prepared for us since the beginning of time: eternal union with him in Heaven. We must study the Bible to learn how God has revealed himself and his plan for our salvation. By reading the Bible, we will learn about the people and events through which God reveals himself and his saving actions. We call this pattern of events **salvation history**.

To plan a trip across the entire United States, you would probably look at a big map of the whole country. In a similar way, this chapter looks at salvation history through the whole Bible so that you can understand the big picture of God's saving plan. And just like a long road trip can be broken into stages, we will break salvation history into stages: the six stages found in the Old Testament, followed by two stages found in the New Testament. Later chapters will explore these stages of salvation history in greater detail.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son.

Hebrews 1:1–2



PRAY IT!

Jesus, you said, "I am with you always." Help me to keep my heart open today, Lord, so I can feel your love at work in me and understand my role in your saving plan. You are always present to me, Lord. Today let me be present to you. Amen.



FUN FACT

The Bible is the most translated book in the world. Parts of the Bible are available in more than two thousand languages, and the whole Bible has been translated into more than 450 languages!

Stage 1: Primeval History

The first stage of salvation history is sometimes called primeval history. *Primeval* means that the events happened before recorded history. Examples of primeval history in Scripture include the accounts of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. You can read these accounts in the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis. From these Scripture accounts, we can learn some very important things:

- God created everything that exists, and everything he created is good.
- God intended that all creatures live together in peace and harmony.



Did You Know?

Jesus Christ Saves All

Salvation is possible for anyone, Catholic or not. Christ is the Savior of all people. The Church has stated that non-Christians who “sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do his will” may achieve eternal salvation (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium]*, 16). In other words, no one is out of reach for God in his plan of salvation. But this does not mean every religion is equal. The full truth and grace needed for salvation can be found only in the Catholic Church.

- God created human beings to have a special relationship with him. He gave human beings the responsibility of caring for creation.
- The sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, damaged their relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation.
- Without God's help, sin leads to death and destruction.

This period of salvation history starts with human beings' living in perfect harmony with God. But it ends with our separation from God and eternal happiness, all because of sin.

Stage 2: The Patriarchs

The second stage of salvation history is the period of the patriarchs, told in chapters 12–50 of the Book of Genesis. In this stage God begins the process of repairing our damaged relationship with him. He forms a special relationship with a Chosen People by making a special promise, called a **covenant**, with a man named Abraham and his wife, Sarah. God promises that their descendants will be numerous and that they will inherit a Promised Land.

I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing.

Genesis 12:2

Stage 3: Egypt and the Exodus



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The third stage of salvation history is the account of the **Exodus** from slavery in Egypt. At the beginning of the Book of Exodus, we discover that the descendants of Jacob's children—called the Israelites—were enslaved in Egypt. God heard their cries and called Moses to lead them out of slavery. But Pharaoh, the Egyptian leader, had a hard heart. God had to send terrible plagues to make Pharaoh let the Israelites go. The Israelites' escape from Egypt and journey to the Holy Land is called the Exodus.

On the way to the Promised Land, the Israelites stopped at Mount Sinai. There God renewed the cov-

God gave the Ten Commandments to provide the Israelites a moral structure for their society. How do the civil laws we live under today relate in some way to the Ten Commandments?

enant he had made with Abraham, and he extended it to all the Israelites. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, which the people must obey as part of the covenant. During the Exodus the people frequently complained and lost their faith in God. As a consequence they were forced to wander in the desert for forty years, and only their children were able to enter the Promised Land.

Stage 4: The Promised Land and the Judges

In the fourth stage of salvation history, the Israelites reach and settle the Promised Land. These accounts appear in the Books of Joshua and Judges in the Old Testament. Moses died before the Israelites could enter the Promised Land, called Canaan. So God chose a new leader, Joshua, to lead the people into Canaan. Much of Canaan was inhabited by other people. So the Israelites needed to fight to gain control of the land. Whenever they trusted God, they were successful in their battles; whenever they lost faith in God, they failed.

Eventually they gained control of the Promised Land, and each of the twelve tribes received its own section of the land. Then new invaders, the Philistines, tried to capture the land. During this stage of salvation history, the Israelites had no king; God was their ruler. But God called special prophets and warriors, called Judges, to help deliver justice and defend the land against the Philistine invasions.



THINK ABOUT IT!

The Bible tells us that when God made his covenant with Abraham, Abraham was overcome by terror (see Genesis 15:12). When the prophet Jonah heard God, he ran the other way (see Jonah 1:3). When Jesus' disciples heard God on the mountaintop, they too were terrified (see Matthew 17:6). God speaks to us because he wants us to know something new or to act differently. That can be scary. What do you think God wants you to do differently? Why might that be scary?

Stage 5: The Kings and the Prophets

The Old Testament also tells us about the fifth stage of salvation history: the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, and several books of the prophets tell us about these kingdoms. At the end of the Book of Judges, the Israelites wanted their own king. God reluctantly answered their plea. He had Samuel—the last of the Judges—anoint Saul as the first king of Israel. David followed Saul as the next king. David, a mighty warrior, united all twelve tribes into one kingdom. When David's son, Solomon, became king, he followed God's instructions to build a Temple in Jerusalem, the capital city. However, after Solomon died, a disagreement arose between the tribes, and the kingdom split in two. Israel became the name of the northern kingdom alone, and Judah became the name of the southern kingdom.

Many of the kings of Israel and Judah worshipped foreign gods and allowed unjust practices in the kingdom. So God called prophets to encourage the people to obey their covenant with him. Prophets like Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah reminded God's Chosen People to stop worshipping idols, to practice justice, and to care for those in need.

**Let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness
like a river that never goes dry.**

Amos 5:24

Stage 6: The Exile and the Return

The sixth stage of salvation history covers the **Exile** and the return from the Exile. You can learn about these events in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, First and Second Maccabees, and some of the later prophets. Despite the prophets' warnings, the people of Israel and Judah continued to turn away from God's covenant. So God let their kingdoms be conquered.



LIVE IT!

You Are Part of God's Plan

There are no excuses when it comes to doing God's work. Some of the greatest figures in the Bible seem at first like they aren't well suited to what God asks of them. For example, Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children, yet God chose them to be the parents of a new nation. Moses was a poor speaker, but God still made him his spokesman. The prophet Jeremiah says he is too young, yet God knows he will become a great leader.

You are also a part of God's plan of salvation. You have a special task to do. Each morning think of one thing you can do to help another person. You could make sure the family car is always stocked with bottled water ready to give to someone in need. You could help a friend prepare for a test. Countless possibilities await your help, even if at first you do not think you are the right person for the job.



LITURGY CONNECTION

Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil is celebrated on the Saturday evening before Easter Sunday. It begins the Church's remembrance of Jesus' Resurrection. The Easter Vigil is also special for two other reasons. First, we welcome new members into the Church on this night. Second, during the Easter Vigil, we recall God's saving actions throughout history. The liturgy for the Easter Vigil includes as many as seven readings from the Bible. They recall the seven days of Creation; the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea; the prophets' pointing the way toward the Messiah; and Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection.

The Easter Vigil liturgy gives us an overview of God's plan of salvation. The Easter Vigil is a dramatic thanksgiving for all God has done for us. If you have never attended the Easter Vigil, plan with your family to attend next Easter.

Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC. Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 BC. We call this time the Exile because many of God's people were taken into captivity. During the Exile, prophets like Ezekiel comforted the Israelites with the promise that God was still with them. The prophets also foretold the coming of a savior, or messiah, who could lead the people to peace.

Fifty years passed in exile. Then a new Persian king conquered Babylon and allowed God's Chosen People—now called Judeans, or Jews—to return to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. After Alexander the Great conquered Babylon, the Greeks ruled Israel. But around 150 BC the Maccabees, a Jewish family, led a successful revolt against the Greeks to restore Jewish independence. During all of these troubled times, many of the Chosen People continued to hope for a messiah to make them great again.

Stage 7: The Life of Jesus Christ

As you have seen, the Old Testament tells us about the first six stages of salvation history. Now the history continues with two more stages described in the New Testament.

The life of Jesus Christ forms the seventh stage of salvation history. God never abandoned his Chosen People, even though they often did not keep their part of the covenant. When the time was right, God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world.

By the time Jesus was born, the Roman Empire had conquered Israel. Some of the Chosen People continued to hope for a messiah, but they envisioned a mighty warrior and king, like David, who could drive out the Romans. Instead, Jesus preached love, justice, and forgiveness. He healed and worked miracles as signs of God's power. He showed that true salvation comes through faith and a change of heart, not through violence and political power. When Jesus was killed by the Romans—with the approval of the Jewish leaders—his followers believed all was lost. Then, after three days, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus' followers then understood that he was truly the Messiah, the promised Savior who had come to fulfill God's plan.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God.”

John 6:68–69

Stage 8: The Church

The final stage of salvation history began with the early Christian Church and continues today. You can read about the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles, the letters in the New Testament, and the Book of Revelation. After his Resurrection, Jesus instructed his closest followers, the Apostles, to go and spread the Good News of salvation to all people. Then after Jesus’ Ascension, he sent the Holy Spirit to empower his followers to carry out his mission.

Jesus’ followers began by preaching to other Jews. Sometimes they were persecuted by Jewish leaders who did not believe in Jesus. One of those persecutors, named Paul, had a vision of Jesus and became a Christian. God revealed to Paul that Christ came for all people. Paul began preaching to non-Jews, who were called **Gentiles**. Many other believers, women and men, helped him. Soon Christianity spread throughout the whole Roman Empire.

Today the Church continues Christ’s mission by telling the whole world about God’s saving love. The Church will continue to share the Gospel until the end of time, when Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. As members of the Church, we take part in Christ’s mission too.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Saint Jerome



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The next time you pick up your Bible, think of Saint Jerome. He was a priest and scholar who lived in the fourth century.

The Pope commissioned Jerome to revise the Latin translation of the Bible. Catholics today have experienced some of the struggles Jerome faced when he revised the Bible, because the translation we use at Mass has also gone through revisions

in recent years. Some people are resistant to the changes, but others have welcomed them, believing that the changes make the words more meaningful, perhaps more accurate and faithful to the original language.

Jerome had both fans and critics, and discussions weren't always pleasant. But this scholar loved the Word of God and wanted to make it understood. Although some focused on an exact, word-for-word translation of the Bible, Jerome focused on translating the overall meaning. The new translation he created came to be known as the Vulgate. Today the Vulgate is still the official Latin version of the Bible used by the Church.

Jerome raised a great question: How do you and I make the Word of God understood by the people we meet each day? As people who believe in God's Word, we are asked to live that Word in a way that makes God known to those we meet.

3 God THE FATHER

KEY WORDS

Yahweh
mystery
Abba

When you picture God in your mind, what do you see? Many people see an old man with white hair and a beard sitting on a throne in a cloud up in the sky. Is this what God really looks like? Not really. It seems that many of us have adopted this image of God, which resembles that of the Greek god Zeus, whom the stories about the ancient Greek gods describe just like this.

Michelangelo painted God as an old man with a white beard. What image comes to your mind when you think of God? What are some other ways to think about God?



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You might be curious why you have the image of this Greek god in your head when you think about the one, true God. Centuries ago, artists needed some way to portray God in their works, but the Bible contained no physical descriptions of God the Father. Some painters used Zeus as the model because he

was the most powerful of the Greek gods. The image of Zeus helped many people connect to some of the traits of God. That image has stuck with us. It is not wrong to picture God like this. However, remember that this is not an accurate representation of God. If God is not an old man with a white beard in the clouds, then who is he?

Who Is God?

If you were asked to describe a friend, you might answer in a few different ways. You could say something about her relationships to others (she is a daughter, a sister, and a friend). You might talk about what she does (she is a student and a softball player). Maybe you would say what kind of person she is (she is smart and kind). We get to know people through their relationships with others and by observing what they do and listening to what they say.

Everything we know about God, we know because he revealed it to us. God first revealed his name to Moses. It is pretty simple but very powerful: I AM. The Hebrew word for I AM is **Yahweh**. The name I AM, or Yahweh, reminds us how immense and beyond us God truly is. I AM may seem like an incomplete sentence (“I am . . . what?”), but that is what makes the name so powerful. Think about all the possibilities that could complete this sentence: the who, what, when,



PRAY IT!

God, our Father, you exist beyond the farthest star, but I also know you are here with me now. I do not know everywhere I will go in the future, but I do know I came from you. I do not always understand your ways, but I do know I can trust you. I cannot even guess how you came to be, but I do know you will always be with me. Amen.



FUN FACT

In the Bible, God often appears in the form of a cloud. When the Israelites escaped from Egypt, they followed a cloud (see Exodus 13:20–22). They camped in one place as long as the cloud covered the Tent of the Lord’s presence (see Numbers 9:15–23). In the New Testament, a cloud came over Jesus, Peter, James, and John, and said, “This is my own dear Son!” (Matthew 17:5).

where, how, and why. There are an infinite number of ways for God to be. God sustains every person, place, time, and condition that exists. At the same time, God exists beyond all people, places, times, and conditions.

Many of our Jewish brothers and sisters do not even say the name of God. The ancient Israelites believed that naming someone or something gave one power over the person or thing. Out of respect for the name of God and for how beyond us he truly is, they substituted “LORD” for the name Yahweh.

Though God is so great and beyond us, he is still close to and intimate with us. He knows every hair on our heads and every passing thought that flows through our minds. The Book of Psalms says it best:

LORD, you have examined me
and you know me.
You know everything I do . . .
Where could I go to escape
from you?
Where could I get away
from your presence?
If I went up to heaven, you
would be there;
if I lay down in the world
of the dead, you
would be there . . .
When my bones were
being formed,

carefully put together in
 my mother's womb,
 when I was growing there
 in secret,
 you knew that I was there—
 you saw me before I was born.
 (139:1–2,7–8,15–16)



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God said, “I am who I am. You must tell them:
 “The one who is called I AM has sent me to you.”
 Exodus 3:14

The author of Psalm 139 expresses how deeply God knows and loves each one of us—from the earliest days in our mother's womb.

The Trinity

Long after God told Moses his name was Yahweh, he revealed much more about himself. He revealed himself as the Holy Trinity—one God in three Divine



LIVE IT!

Growing Our Relationships

In reading the Bible, you'll learn that God did not just create us and then run off. He continues to care for us with truth and love. Some of his care for us comes in the form of people in our lives with whom we have important relationships. These people include our parents and other family members, friends, and teachers. Take time to recognize God's work in your life through these people. In a similar way, be a source of God's care for others. Provide a helping hand, words of encouragement, and companionship to others, especially those who might be most in need. Be an instrument of God's love and care for others.



Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, "God the Father loves each one of us with a passionate love, and holds us in His tender embrace," copyright © Radiant Light 2008, www.radiantlight.org.uk

Imagine being held in the arms of God! God holds each one of us in his loving embrace, as a mother loves her child.

Persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the Holy Trinity. This is the central belief of our Christian faith. God, in three Divine Persons, is all knowing, all-powerful, and present everywhere. Try to imagine that. Even when God reveals himself to us, he remains a **mystery**. As hard as we try, we can't fully understand this mystery. (See chapter 4, "The Holy Trinity," of this handbook for more about the Trinity.)

God the Father

Let's explore the First Divine Person of the Trinity—God the Father. He is far beyond any image we can conjure in our minds. The Bible portrays God as having both masculine and feminine qualities, but still God is



Did You Know?

"Abba": Jesus' Name for His Father

In the Gospels, Jesus addresses God as "**Abba**." The language Jesus spoke was Aramaic, and *abba* is the Aramaic word for "father." This gives us an idea of the special bond Jesus has with his Father. The Father loves Jesus, much as a human father loves his children by protecting, feeding, and teaching them. Yet the Bible also sometimes portrays God's motherly characteristics. "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you," says the Lord (Isaiah 66:13, NRSV). Jesus teaches us to address God as "Father" and to share in his special close relationship with God, our loving Father.

neither male nor female. We praise God as a loving, powerful Father, at the same time recognizing that our picture of him is incomplete. Despite our limited understanding of God, we know and profess in faith through our Creed that God the Father is maker of “all things visible and invisible,” the Creator of Heaven and earth.

“My thoughts,” says the LORD, “are not like yours, / and my ways are different from yours. / As high as the heavens are above the earth, / so high are my ways and thoughts above yours.”

Isaiah 55:8–9

Jesus called God “Father,” and we do the same. In calling God “Father,” Jesus expresses his unique relationship with him. “My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27).

God the Father is most certainly a distinct and special person, but unlike us, he is not a human being. Though this might seem obvious, it is important to note this difference between God and us. We should remind ourselves that God’s ways are not human ways.

The universe has been around for billions of years. You might think that because—as we confess in the Creed—God is the Creator of the universe, he must be at least



Think About It!

Jesus called the Father “Abba” or “Father” (see the article “Abba: Jesus’ Name for His Father”) and said we should also do this when we pray. Jesus tells us we should rely on God as children rely on their parents. How do you rely on your parents? How do they provide for you? What are some good things you have seen fathers do for their children? How is your relationship with God like a child’s relationship with his or her parents?



LITURGY CONNECTION

Thanks to the Father

Have you ever noticed that most of our prayers at Mass are directed to God the Father? Although our prayers also address Jesus Christ, his Divine Son, they are mostly spoken to the Father. If you think about it, it makes sense. During Mass, we recall all the good things God the Father has done for us, including sending his Son. His Son, Jesus, is the greatest way for human beings to get to know the Father. We also thank God for doing this. But again, Jesus is a key part of our gratitude. We offer thanks to the Father in the same way we come to know the Father: “through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

several billion years old, right? (See chapter 6 for more about creation.) The only problem with this idea is that time itself is a part of God’s creation. God lives outside time, and because he created it, he is not limited or confined by it. If this boggles your mind, do not worry. It can baffle the most intelligent minds on our planet.

Logically, one could say that God created everything in the universe, but the next step backward is the difficult one. Who made God? The answer is that no one made God. God is not a created being, but rather one who is, always was, and always will be.

If this somehow doesn’t make sense, do not worry. This is why we call God a **mystery**. A religious mystery is not like a story the reader has just not figured out. Rather this kind of mystery refers to a truth so big that no human being can completely know or understand it.

God Is Truth and Love

Throughout time, God has revealed himself to us. He is Yahweh. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Divine Persons in one being. He is Truth and Love.

God is Truth simply because what he tells us is true. We can trust God’s Word.

We can count on God, more than even the most trusted human being we know. God always keeps his promises.

God is also Love. First and foremost, God created us out of love. God's love does not end at creation though. The Bible is filled with stories describing what God has done for us. Even though we human beings have failed to keep our part of the bargain, God forgives us and continues to be faithful to his people. Most important, God became one of us out of love for us. God the Father gave his only Son for our salvation and sent the Holy Spirit to be with us always. There is no greater sign of love than this.



CHURCH HISTORY

Teaching about the One God of the Old and New Testaments

In the second century AD, a man named Marcion thought the God of the New Testament could not be the same as the one in violent stories of the Old Testament. He argued that the loving and forgiving God was revealed only by Jesus in the New Testament. Marcion did not consider what the human authors of the Old Testament thought about God. The Old Testament writers pictured God this way because they thought of him as a warrior who protected his people when they were good. Without considering the intentions of the human authors, people like Marcion can misunderstand Scripture. The Church Fathers (the leaders of the early Church) declared that Marcion was incorrect and emphasized that there is only one true God of both the Old and New Testaments.

4 THE HOLY TRINITY

KEY WORDS

Trinity
God the Father
Son of God
Holy Spirit

Think of the many different ways you have reached out to God in the past. There may have been times when you wanted the comfort of the all-knowing Father, who could help you see that everything was going to be okay. Or maybe you reached out to God as one who could move mountains and change lives. Other times you may have reached out to God when you were confused. Maybe you wanted God

We share in the life and love of the Trinity. Pictures like this one help us to imagine our relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one God.



Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, "Through faith, baptism, and loving obedience, we share in the life of the Holy Trinity," copyright © Radiant Light 2008, www.radiantlight.org.uk

to inspire you or reveal his will to you. Of course there were times when you just wanted God's presence, providing comfort during a hard time, like having a friend who is always there to listen to you—someone who has gone through the same pain and suffering as you. The good news is that God satisfies all of these needs.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:13

One God, Three Divine Persons

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." How many times have you said or heard these words? Have you ever really thought about what the phrase means? During Mass on Sundays, Catholics stand to say the Creed. Together we state, "I believe in one God . . ." But if someone thinks the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate individuals, he or she would be misunderstanding the central truth of our faith.

The earliest Christians were Jews who followed Jesus when they recognized that he was the Messiah sent from God to save Israel. Because they were Jewish, they knew there could be only one God. One of the



PRAY IT!

In the name of the Father, who created everyone I love and all I know; and of the Son, who became a human being like me, and showed me the right way to live; and of the Holy Spirit, who inspires me with courage and creativity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in you I place my trust. Amen.



FUN FACT

The Bible often refers to God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but it never uses the word *Trinity*. Instead, this understanding of God as the Blessed Trinity comes from Sacred Tradition. All the major Christian traditions share a common belief in this central mystery of faith.

most basic prayers of the Jewish faith is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, as follows: “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, NRSV). Yet these Jewish Christians knew that Jesus was the Son of God and was one with the Father. They were also aware that the Hebrew Scriptures—our Old Testament—spoke of the Spirit of God. Through these experiences, they realized that the one true God revealed himself as three Persons: the Trinity.

In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things.

John 1:1–3

The Trinity is the central mystery of our Christian life and faith. God has made himself known to us in the three Divine Persons of the **Trinity**: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet these three Divine Persons are one God and cannot be separated from one another.

The Trinity is not divided into three parts. For example, a baseball team is made up of a pitcher, catcher, first baseman, and so on. When all nine players are assembled, you have a complete baseball team. This is not so for the Trinity. Each Divine Person of the

Trinity does not make up one-third of the whole God. Instead, the complete presence of God can be found in each of them. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be separated from one another.

If you have ever watched a pair of truly great dancers in action, it almost seems as if you are watching just one dancer. They move in complete harmony together. When one dancer lifts the other, it seems as if there is no effort. Each move flows naturally into the next. It seems as though the two blend into one single dancer.

In a similar, but far more real, way, the three Divine Persons of the Trinity live in complete harmony. They are distinct Persons, yet they are completely united. Unlike the dancers, they are not united just by their actions. They are also united by what and who they are: one Divine Being.

The Work of the Trinity

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. Therefore all the works of God are done by all three Divine Persons. However, some of God's works are more strongly associated with either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

God the Father is the First Person of the Blessed Trinity. When we speak of



Think About It!

When making the Sign of the Cross, we say, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We also move our hands in the shape of a cross on our head, chest, and shoulders. Why do you think the Sign of the Cross connects the Trinity and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross? How are each of the three Divine Persons of the Trinity connected to Jesus' suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension?

God as the Creator, we tend to think of God the Father. However, even though the work of Creation is associated with God the Father, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together are one source of creation. Like a parent, the Father is the source from which life comes. It is natural to think of God the Father when we think of the Creator.

Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19–20

God the Son is the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ. The title **Son of God** points to Jesus' divine relationship with the Father as the only Son of God. We also call Jesus Christ the "Savior" to recognize his saving actions on our behalf. But we cannot forget that the Father and the Holy Spirit also save us.

The Trinity is a never-ending circle of love. Family members mirror the love of the Trinity when they share love with one another.



© Richard Hutchings/CORBIS

God the **Holy Spirit** is the Third Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity. He inspires, guides, and makes the lives of the believers holy. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are truly given by the Father and the Son too. Yet it is proper to recognize the gifts as being from the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity Is a Communion

Because God is three Divine Persons in one, the Trinity is the communion of those three Persons. Another way of saying this is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are completely in union with one another. They communicate perfectly and are in perfect harmony.



Did You Know?

The Sign of the Cross

Christians have been making the Sign of the Cross for almost two thousand years. In the early days of Christianity, Christians moved their thumbs across their foreheads in the shape of a cross. It was a reminder to carry the cross of Christ in their lives. In other words, we are called to sacrifice ourselves to help others. During the times and in the places Christianity was illegal, making the Sign of the Cross became a secret way for Christians to recognize one another. Today, Catholics often make the Sign of the Cross when we enter a church. We dip our fingers into the holy water to make the Sign of the Cross, as a reminder of our Baptisms.



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Saint Patrick used a shamrock to teach people about the Trinity. What does a shamrock have in common with the Trinity?

Because the Trinity is a perfect communion of the three Divine Persons, we can see how the Trinity is the perfect community. The love and unity that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share are so perfect that they flow out to us. Our families share in this love and

community. The love of a mother and father extends past them to the children they share. That love can extend even past the family. The love in our families should flow out in service to the rest of the community and the entire world.



LIVE IT!

Harmony at Home

The Trinity is a community that lives in complete harmony, unity, and love. Unlike the Trinity, human families are not perfect communities. But you can work toward creating a home of harmony, unity, and love by doing some simple things. For example, you might do your chores without being asked. This might seem like a typical corny thing an adult would tell you. But what would happen if you did it? Your parents would quit having to nag you about simple chores. You wouldn't have to listen to them complain. And they would be less frustrated too! Doesn't that sound like a more harmonious community to you? This is only one way of making a home of unity, harmony, and love. However you do it, it will take some work, but the payoff is worth it.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Saint Patrick



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Saint Patrick was born in the fourth century AD in what later became Great Britain. As a youth Patrick was kidnapped and taken to Ireland, where he became the slave of a warlord for several years. At that time Ireland was a rough place to live. The Irish tribes were often at war, slavery was common, and human sacrifice was practiced. After several years Patrick either escaped or was released. He returned

home, where he soon became a priest. Later Patrick returned to Ireland, the land of his former captors, to preach the Gospel. This was an extremely brave step. Ireland certainly had been a difficult place for him earlier, and at that time, few people had traveled to such a foreign place to convert others to Christianity. He bravely went and later was appointed the Bishop of Ireland.

Patrick planted the seeds of Christianity in Ireland. Over the next few decades, the practices of both slavery and human sacrifice ended in Ireland. Legend says that Patrick used a shamrock to explain the Trinity to the Irish people. Like the three Persons united in one God, the shamrock is made up of three leaves united to make this single, unique plant. Today, Patrick is remembered for his courage and his strong faith, and for his teaching about the one true God in three Divine Persons.

5 THE BIBLE: THE OLD TESTAMENT

KEY WORDS

Pentateuch
Judges
prophet
Baal and Asherah

As Christians we have Jewish roots. This is because we are followers of Jesus, and Jesus was a Jew. He obeyed the Jewish Covenant and Law. He worshipped in synagogues (a Jewish community center and place of prayer) and at the Temple in Jerusalem. And he knew the Jewish Scriptures very well. In the Gospels, Jesus frequently quotes the Jewish Scriptures—essentially the Old Testament of the Bible—in his teaching and preaching.

We owe the Jewish people a debt of gratitude for preserving God’s Revelation in the books of the Old Testament so that we can read them today.

The Old Testament			Books of the Prophets (18 Books)
	Historical Books (16 Books)		Isaiah
	Joshua		Jeremiah
	Judges		Lamentations
	Ruth		Baruch
	1 Samuel		Ezekiel
	2 Samuel		Daniel
	1 Kings		Hosea
	2 Kings		Joel
	1 Chronicles	Wisdom and Poetry Books (7 Books)	Amos
	2 Chronicles	Job	Obadiah
	Ezra	Psalms	Jonah
	Nehemiah	Proverbs	Micah
Pentateuch (5 Books)	Tobit	Ecclesiastes	Nahum
Genesis	Judith	Song of Songs	Habakkuk
Exodus	Esther	Wisdom	Zephaniah
Leviticus	1 Maccabees	Sirach	Haggai
Numbers	2 Maccabees		Zechariah
Deuteronomy			Malachi

Our faith is built upon the Jewish faith practiced by Jesus. We are the spiritual descendants of the Jewish people—God’s Chosen People. To understand our faith better, we can study and pray with the Old Testament to understand the Chosen People’s relationship with God.

The Old Testament is divided into four major sections:

1. the Pentateuch
2. the historical books
3. the wisdom and poetry books
4. the prophets

This chapter looks at each of these sections and discusses some important stories and people you will find in them. Other chapters in this handbook cover some of these sections in greater detail. But the best way to learn about the Old Testament is to read it, so this chapter identifies many Bible passages for you to look up.

This chapter also introduces you to several different kinds of writing in the Bible. These different kinds of writing are called literary genres. The Bible includes symbolic writing, laws, songs for worship, historical accounts, proverbs, short stories, love poetry, speeches, and prophetic sayings. Knowing the literary genre of a Bible passage is one step toward interpreting the passage correctly.



PRAY IT!

Give thanks to the LORD,
because he is good,
and his love is eternal.
Let the people of Israel say:
“His love is eternal.”
Let the priests of God say,
“His love is eternal.”
Let all who worship him say,
“His love is eternal.”
This is the day of the
LORD’S victory;
let us be happy, let us
celebrate!
Save us, LORD, save us!
Give us success, O LORD!
(Psalm 118:1–4, 24–25)

The Pentateuch

The **Pentateuch** is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. *Pentateuch* is a Greek word that means “five containers of scrolls”—the books of the Bible were originally written on scrolls. You may also have heard Jewish people call these five books the Torah. Let’s look at these five books more closely.

The first book, Genesis, tells about the creation of the world, Adam and Eve, Original Sin, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. Genesis goes on to describe the beginning of the Chosen People through God’s covenant with Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac’s son Jacob.

Jacob’s descendants, the Israelites, were forced to migrate to Egypt because of drought. Their population grew so large that the Egyptian rulers felt threatened and enslaved them all. That is where the Book of Exodus picks up the history. This book tells how the Jewish people escaped from slavery in Egypt with the help of God and the leadership of Moses. The Book of Exodus includes accounts of the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses’ receiving God’s Law (summarized in the Ten Commandments), the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf, and the Israelites’ wandering in the desert in search of the Promised Land.

The remaining three books of the Pentateuch tell us more about God’s Law and his covenant with the Israelites, as well as the Israelites’ journey to the

Promised Land. The Book of Leviticus is a collection of laws followed by the Chosen People—laws about religious worship, ways to stay pure, and guidelines for the fair and just treatment of one another. The Book of Numbers takes its name from the census in which Moses counted all the people. This book also describes the Israelites' successes and their failures in their first attempts to enter the Promised Land. The Book of Deuteronomy is presented as Moses' final words to the Chosen People before they entered the Promised Land. The accounts in Deuteronomy repeat many of the stories and laws found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

Israel remember this! The LORD—and the LORD alone—is our God. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Never forget these commands that I am giving you today.

Deuteronomy 6:4–6

These five books of the Pentateuch reveal important things about God and his original plan for Creation and humanity. We need this knowledge to understand what is happening in the rest of the Bible. Here is a list of some of these teachings and where you can read more about them:

- God made everything, and everything he made is good (see Genesis 1:1–2:4).
- God made human beings to be in a special relationship with him and to participate in his work of caring for creation (see Genesis 2:5–15).

- God made man and woman to complement each other and to join together in marriage (see Genesis 2:18–25).
- Sin damages our relationship with God and with each other (see Genesis 3:1–24, 4:1–16).
- God wishes to be in a loving and committed relationship—covenant relationship—with human beings (see Genesis 17:1–9, Exodus 24:1–8, Deuteronomy 7:7–8:19).
- God hears us when we call out to him, and he rescues us from sin and evil (see Exodus, chapters 1–15).
- God gives us his Law to teach us how to live in a good relationship with him and with one another (see Exodus, chapters 19–20; Deuteronomy, chapters 5–6).

The Historical Books

The second section of the Old Testament contains the historical books (from Joshua to Second Maccabees). This label can be misleading, because these are not books of pure history. Most describe historical people and events, but they are written to emphasize God's actions in history—something modern history books never do.

The historical books form the largest section of the Old Testament. For now let's focus on a few key people and events described in the Books of Joshua,

Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings. The history told in these books starts immediately after the Exodus, when the Chosen People entered the Promised Land. They were led by Joshua, whom God appointed to lead the people after Moses died. Joshua was a wise and faithful man and also a skilled warrior. You can read about him in the Book of Joshua. Under Joshua's leadership the Israelites conquered the Promised Land—called Canaan, or Israel—and divided it among the Israelite tribes. Joshua is famous for having said, "As for my family and me, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

After Joshua's death the Chosen People did not have a king or appointed leader. But whenever trouble came, God raised up a spirit-filled leader who helped them fight off the threat. These leaders were called **Judges**, and their stories are told in the Book of Judges. One of the Judges was a famous woman named Deborah (see Judges, chapter 4). She led the



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In 1 Kings 18:25–39, the Prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal. In answer to Elijah's prayer, fire came down from Heaven to consume God's altar and its offerings. The people then believed in the one true God.

people to victory against a Canaanite general named Sisera. Another famous Judge was Samson. Samson was very strong, but he was also sinful and broke many commitments to God. After Samson was captured by his enemies, God gave him one last chance to destroy them, but doing so cost Samson his life (see Judges, chapters 13–16).

The last Judge of Israel was Samuel. He was also a priest and a prophet and has two books of the Bible named after him: First and Second Samuel. During the time of Samuel, the people wanted a king. They believed a king would offer the nation more protection and also more importance. God told Samuel to do as the people asked, so Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel (see 1 Samuel, chapters 8–10). At first Saul seemed like a good king, but he turned out to lack a strong faith in God. So



LIVE IT!

Journal about Your Relationship with God

When you read the Old Testament, you encounter a long history of God's saving words and actions in the world. Today God is present to you through the people and events in your own life. As a spiritual exercise, consider starting a journal to observe God's presence in your life. Begin by thinking back on your childhood, and tell your story in terms of people or events that brought you closer to God. Continue writing in your journal every day or once a week to reflect on how God is present to you today.

God had Samuel anoint a young man named David to succeed Saul as king. David turned out to be a very good king—the best-known king of Israel (see 1 Samuel, chapters 16–19; 2 Samuel, chapters 2–8). But not even David was perfect. He committed several serious sins during his years as king. Still, he was also a model of servant leadership in repenting for his sins and serving his people (see 2 Samuel, chapters 11–12).

After David's death, Solomon, his son, became king. Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule the Chosen People justly. God granted Solomon not only wisdom but also wealth and a long life (see 1 Kings, chapter 3). Solomon built a beautiful Temple for God in the capital city of Jerusalem (see 1 Kings, chapters 5–8). But like his father, Solomon also committed some serious sins, especially the sin of idolatry. After Solomon's death, civil war split the kingdom of Israel into two separate kingdoms. The northern kingdom was now called Israel, and the southern kingdom was called Judah (see 1 Kings, chapters 11–12).

The stories of many less famous kings are told in First and Second Kings: nineteen kings in the kingdom of Israel and nineteen more in the kingdom of Judah. Most of these kings were sinful in the eyes of God. They worshipped false gods and goddesses and were not fair in their dealings with people. But we also



Think About It!

Look back at the four sections of the Old Testament that are introduced in this chapter. Which section most interests you after reading this overview? If you could pick one Old Testament book to begin reading today, which would it be and why?



FUN FACT

When Moses asked God what his name is, God told Moses that his name is Yahweh, which means something like “I Am.” The Jewish people believe that God’s name is too holy to speak out loud, so they say or write *Lord* instead. This is why many English-language Bibles use the word LORD (in all caps or small caps) instead of the name Yahweh.

read about some good kings, such as Hezekiah (see 2 Kings, chapters 18–20) and Josiah (see 2 Kings, chapters 22–23). Nonetheless, because the kings and the people had broken their covenant with God so many times, God allowed both kingdoms to be conquered, Israel by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians.

I am in trouble, God—listen to my prayer!

I am afraid of my enemies—save my life!

Psalm 64:1

After Judah was conquered, the Babylonians took many of the Israelites back to Babylon to live in slavery. This was called the Babylonian Exile, or just the Exile, and it was a very sad time for the Chosen People. God allowed this Exile so his people could learn the importance of trusting in him and staying true to their covenant with him. After about fifty years, the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians, whose king allowed the Israelite slaves to return to the Promised Land and rebuild Jerusalem and their Temple. The story of their return and rebuilding is told in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

As you can see, the Books of Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings tell us much about the history of God’s Chosen People after the Exodus. The historical writings of the Old Testament include other books that help flesh out the

history of God’s People. First and Second Chronicles provide different accounts of the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. The Book of Tobit is a short story about the angel Raphael, a faithful Jew named Tobit, and Tobit’s son Tobias’s search for a wife. The Books of Ruth, Judith, and Esther tell us about brave women who helped the Jewish people. And First and Second Maccabees—the last of the historical books in the Old Testament—tell us about five brothers and their father who led a revolt against an evil Greek ruler after the Israelites returned from the Exile.



Did You Know?

The Relationship between the Old and New Testaments

Another word for *testament* is *covenant*. So the Old Testament is about the covenant God made with his Chosen People at Mount Sinai, and the New Testament is about the covenant God made with all people through the saving work of Christ. But even the words Old and New can be misleading. For Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them but to make their teachings come true” (Matthew 5:17). So when you hear “Old Testament,” you might think of “original covenant,” and when you hear “New Testament,” you might think of “fulfilled covenant.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes an old saying: “The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New”¹ (129).

The Wisdom and Poetry Books

The third section in the Old Testament contains the wisdom and poetry books: namely, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, and Sirach. These books contain many different kinds of writing: a long debate, hymns used for worship, teachings about wisdom, short proverbs, and even love poetry. Two things connect these books. First, most of them provide us with teachings about how to be a wise person—that is, how to live a good and holy life. The Chosen People knew that wise people pleased God by living good and holy lives and foolish people displeased God by living selfish and sinful lives.

The second element that connects the books in this section is that they all contain passages of poetry. But the poetry in the Old Testament is different from most poetry you might know. It doesn't rhyme or have a specific rhythm. Hebrew poetry is written in groups of two (sometimes three) alternating lines. In most Bibles today, the second line is indented. The second line usually repeats the main idea from the first line using different words and images, but sometimes the second line expands the idea in the first line.

Let's take a brief look at each of the wisdom and poetry books. The section begins with the Book of Job. Job was a man who lost everything. Most of the book describes a long debate between Job and his

friends about why his bad fortune happened. Today people study the Book of Job to understand an age-old question: Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?

You are probably most familiar with the Book of Psalms, the hymns and prayers for God's Chosen People. This book contains 150 prayers that were meant to be sung as part of Jewish worship. They cover nearly every human situation and emotion. Today you encounter the Psalms in the Responsorial Psalm at Mass. They are also an important part of the Liturgy of the Hours, the official prayer of the Church that clergy, religious men and women, and many laypeople pray each day.

The Psalms are followed by the Book of Proverbs, a collection of sayings that gives advice on how to be a good and wise person. Most of these are short, one-line sayings. Next, the Book of Ecclesiastes describes the unfairness of life and the things that



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We look to leaders in our Church and civic communities to share their wisdom with us. Who shares their wisdom and advice with you? Why is it important to listen to them and to follow their advice?



LITURGY CONNECTION

Jewish Roots in the Mass

Much of our worship follows the Jewish forms of worship that Jesus and the Apostles knew. At Mass, the Liturgy of the Word echoes the Jewish custom of reading aloud from the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue. Jesus himself read from the Book of Isaiah at a synagogue service (see Luke 4:19–21). The Liturgy of the Word also includes a psalm, and the singing of psalms was part of Jewish worship.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist has roots in the Jewish Passover, which Jesus celebrated at the Last Supper. The Prayer over the Offerings, in which we thank God, is based on a Jewish form of prayer called the *berakah*. In this prayer, we thank God for the gifts of bread and wine that will soon become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Of course, the very fact that we have a day set apart for worship and rest has its roots in the Jewish Sabbath.

do not bring true happiness. The writer advises us to accept both the good and the bad parts of life.

The Song of Solomon (sometimes called the Song of Songs) is a unique book. At first it appears to be a collection of love poetry that celebrates the relationship between a man and a woman. Why does a book of love poetry appear in the Old Testament? For Jews the poems symbolize the love between God and his Chosen People. For Christians this book also symbolizes the love between Christ and the Church.

This section concludes with the Book of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Ben Sira. The Book of Wisdom teaches us that God will reward good people after death and punish evil people. For God's Chosen People, the Book of Wisdom was also a reminder of their wise ancestors. Ben Sira contains the teachings of a man who lived about 150 years before Jesus was born. He gave very practical advice for living a good and holy life.

The Prophets

The fourth and final section of the Old Testament contains the writings of important Jewish prophets. A **prophet** is a person whom God calls to speak on his behalf. Many prophets appear in the Old Testament, but less than half have their own books. In the prophets section, we find sixteen Israelite prophets whose words were written in books named after them. Two other books in this section are not the words of prophets: Lamentations and Baruch. And as you have already seen, the accounts of other prophets like Moses, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha are told in other books of the Bible.

The prophets of Israel had two basic messages. The first and most common message reminded the Chosen People that they had failed to live out their promises to God by keeping their part of the covenant. The prophets usually addressed failures such as idolatry, injustice, and false worship of God:

- **Idolatry.** Idolatry is the worship of false gods and goddesses. The Israelites kept turning to gods like **Baal and Asherah** instead of worshipping the true God (see Jeremiah 2:11).
- **Injustice.** God's Law called his Chosen People to treat one another fairly and justly, but wealthy and powerful people took advantage of others, creating an unjust society (see Isaiah 1:16–17).
- **False worship.** God was especially hurt when his people pretended to worship him with

pure hearts while they were also worshipping false gods and practicing injustice (see Amos 5:21–24).

But the prophets did not only condemn the Chosen People; at times they also delivered messages of hope. The Israelites went through many dark periods during their history, especially when they were attacked by foreign invaders, when the northern and southern kingdoms were conquered, and when the people were taken into Exile. During these times God's people needed to hear words of encouragement. God provided those words through the prophets too. Sometimes a prophet spoke a message of condemnation and then later spoke messages of hope on important themes about faithfulness, survival, and salvation.

- **God is faithful.** Even though the Chosen People were suffering because of their disobedience to God, God would be faithful to his covenant promises (see Jeremiah 46:27–28).
- **The faithful will survive.** God always promised that the faithful people would survive to continue his covenant. They might be a small group, but God would protect them (see Micah 2:12).
- **God will send a messiah.** God also promised to send a *messiah*—a word that means “anointed one”—to lead the people back to him. The prophet Isaiah described the Messiah as a servant who would suffer for the people. Isaiah's

prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 53:11).

You can read more about the prophets in chapter 10, “The Bible: The Prophets,” of this handbook. There you will also learn how Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised by God in the Old Testament.

Make it your aim to do what is right, not what is evil, so that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty really will be with you, as you claim he is.

Amos 5:14



CHURCH HISTORY

Biblical Studies

In 1943, during the darkest days of World War II, Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. The Latin title is taken from the first words of the document, “Inspired by the Holy Spirit.” This encyclical is a landmark for Catholic biblical scholars because it encouraged historical research into the books of the Bible. It also encouraged Scripture scholars to study biblical texts as they would ancient literature, in their original languages, with the aim of uncovering the truth God reveals to us in Sacred Scripture. This encyclical gave guidelines for the study of biblical texts, advocating the importance of the literal meaning of the words and the intention of the sacred writer.

All writing reflects the culture in which it was written. This encyclical urged Scripture scholars, also called *exegetes* [EX-uh-jeets], to seek the original intention of the inspired human author, so that the truth God wished to reveal can be made clear. In order to do this, exegetes were encouraged to investigate the life and times of the Scripture writers, their written or oral sources, and their particular forms of expression.

6 CREATION

KEY WORDS

Heaven and earth
creation
angels

Think about the following: A falling star in the night sky away from city lights. A beaver building a dam. People doing good things for others. Friends having fun together. A family gathering to celebrate a special occasion. Have these or similar events from everyday life ever made you recognize God's goodness? Have you ever wondered where everything that exists has come from? Have you wondered why you exist or where you came from? Do

Beautiful scenes of nature are like billboards from God: See how much I love you! I created a world this awesome for you!



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you sometimes question where the world is headed or where life is taking you?

The first line of the Bible is a good place to begin looking for some answers. Genesis 1:1 proclaims that God created the heavens and the earth. **“Heaven and earth”** is a way of referring to the entire universe. This passage from Genesis tells us that God is the creator of all that exists. Everything depends on God. He created out of nothing and without help.

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. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

Genesis 1:1–3, NRSV

Scientists work on figuring out the physical nature of the universe. This includes trying to determine how big it is, how old it is, and what chemicals make it up. Why did God create the universe, the earth, and all living things? Why did God create us? Science can’t answer these questions. The good news is that God can answer them. He has revealed to us that he created everything because of love.

God didn’t have to create the world. It was a free choice motivated by love. He wanted to share his love with his creatures. **Creation** is a gift, and all creation is good. God wants all people



PRAY IT!

Lord, God of all creation, thank you for everything you have created and everything you have given me. Help me recognize my own goodness. Continue to bless all your people as we strive to understand your will for our lives and as we care for all creation. Amen.

to share in his wisdom, beauty, and goodness and to live in union with him. He desires a personal, loving relationship with each of us. He created the world and all of us so that we might share in his glory.

Why Does Evil Exist?

The things that help us recognize the goodness of God’s creation are only part of the reality we know. Our world includes evil too. We see signs of this in such things as war and violence, people doing selfish and hateful things, nature spoiled by pollution, and people in many parts of the world suffering because they lack food, shelter, and other necessities. Why does evil exist when God created everything to be

good? If you have ever wondered about this, you are not alone.

Part of the mystery of creation is that God makes good things happen, even in evil situations. This doesn’t turn evil into goodness. It does, however, give us confidence that God would not allow an evil to happen if it were not possible for something good to come of it. Even though we can expect to continue to struggle to understand why evil exists, we trust that we will fully understand God’s plan after we die. We will see God face-to-face and come to understand his ways of guiding the world.



Think About It!

We are called to be “coworkers” with God in the work of creation. What does this mean? Identify some examples of things people your age can do that help make the world around us what God wants it to be.

Our trust and hope are rooted in Jesus Christ. His suffering and death on the cross—his execution—were great evils, but that was not the end of the story. An amazing good followed. Jesus was raised from the dead and calls us to share in his new life.

We know that the final end to evil has not yet happened, but we live with the faith that it will. At that time God’s plan for the world and for us will be fully realized.

Sin

One reason helps explain why some evil exists, and that reason is human sin. God created all people, “making them to be like himself” (Genesis 1:26). Another way to say this is that we are created in God’s image. This means that we were created for love. For our love to be genuine, it must be something we freely choose to do. Think about it. If loving behavior is simply programmed into us, isn’t really love, is it? Because we have the freedom to choose to love, we also have the freedom to choose the opposite. We can choose to do things that are unloving. These choices separate us from God and from one another. Another word for this type of action is *sin*.

Any sin is like polluting the delicate balance in the environment of love God created. Even a small sin has a ripple effect. Can you think of an example?



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LITURGY CONNECTION

Gifts of Bread and Wine

At the next Sunday Mass, notice the bread and wine as they are carried to the altar during the Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts. These are God's gifts to us more than our gifts to God. We are simply giving back to God the things he has already given us. The gifts are from the earth (the grain for the bread) and the vine (the grapes for the wine). They are also the work of human hands, because we work to make bread from grain and wine from grapes. These gifts are signs of the goodness of God and of our cooperation with God. They are signs of our dependence on God's creation for our physical lives—just as we depend on God for our spiritual lives.

Sins also include things we should do but choose not to. Our sins can lead to results that harm other people and God's creation. Unfortunately, sin is a reality that affects us all because of Original Sin.

Adam and Eve, our first parents, whom we hear about in the Book of Genesis, rejected God's love in the Garden of Eden. By committing this sin, which we call Original Sin, they disrupted God's plan for creation. They wounded themselves and all of us by passing on to us a tendency to sin. The good news, however, is that God did not abandon us as a result of Adam and Eve's sin. His plan for creation continues to unfold in history. God's creation is not finished yet. He continues to work to bring about the loving relationships he desires.

The high point of God's plan for creation is Jesus Christ. In him God became man to save us. Christ is sometimes called the New Creation, because he came to give us new life. He came to restore and deepen our union with God.

The Journey of Creation

It is helpful to keep in mind that creation is not simply one event that happened a long time ago. God's love and presence are never-ending, and his work of creation keeps going. One way to imagine this is to think of the universe as a journey. God has a map for the journey and is guiding creation to a final end. Can you imagine all things being perfect and everyone being completely happy? This is the destiny of the human race. Everything has been created for us. This means that among all creatures, human beings are most valuable in God's eyes. This special place in creation comes with a responsibility.

**I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds,
and all the wild animals.**

Genesis 1:28

We trust in God's plan, but that doesn't mean we go about our lives just waiting for it to unfold. We have a part to play. We have a special role on this journey. We must keep our eyes open so we recognize God's presence in our lives and the world around us. What's more, we are called to cooperate with God and be his coworkers. This means we share in the responsibility of helping the world around us be what God wants it to be—a place where love rules. Our challenge is to think about God's desires for the world and all his creatures. We must make choices about our relationships and our care of the earth that



FUN FACT

Science confirms that creation isn't finished. Every second the universe grows larger, and the rate of growth keeps getting faster.

are in line with God's will. We don't do this on our own, however, apart from God. Through the Holy Spirit, God is always at work in our actions.

The Role of the Trinity in Creation

When Catholics talk about God as Creator, we are referring to all three Persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We associate Creation most closely with God the Father, but it is important to remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together are one God. If we think of the Father creating alone, we can make the mistake of thinking

God created the world, and it was good. How do we help one another restore the world to a place of peace and harmony where love rules? Why is care of the earth so important to peace among all God's people?



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Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit came into being after the Father and are not one with him, even today. Saint Irenaeus offers a helpful image. He emphasizes that creation is the work of all three Persons of the Trinity by referring to the Son and the Spirit as the hands of the Father. God the Father keeps the universe going through his Word, Jesus Christ, and through the creative power of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life.

One symbol for the Trinity is an equilateral triangle—with three sides of equal length. This signifies that all three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are equal. The one triangle emphasizes that the Persons are unified and that they are one God.



Did You Know?

Creation and Creationism

Perhaps you have heard the word *creationism* in news stories about how the creation of the world is covered in public school classrooms. Creationists read the Bible like a science textbook and believe that the accounts of the Creation in Genesis are scientifically accurate. Creationists believe God created everything in a matter of days. This leads them to completely discount evolution, the scientific theory that life has changed over time from earlier forms of life. Catholic teaching about Creation differs. Catholics don't read Genesis like a science textbook, recognizing that biblical writers didn't write scientific reports. If we read the accounts of Creation as science, we would miss the main points and set up unintended conflicts between faith and science.

The Visible and the Invisible

When we pray the Nicene Creed, we describe God as the maker of both what is visible and what is invisible. We recognize that there is more to creation than the material things we can see and touch. Knowing of an invisible part of reality opens us up to the miraculous. It helps us understand that God is present and at work, even if we do not see any signs. Although we must be careful about making too many assumptions about the invisible aspects of creation, we know about one thing for certain: the existence of **angels**.

Angels are as real as you and me, but they are beings of spirit, not matter. They have intelligence, will, and individuality, and they are immortal. The word *angel* comes from a Greek word that means “messenger.” Angels are God’s servants and messengers. They glorify God without ceasing and watch over each of us every moment of our lives.



LIVE IT!

Capture God’s Creation

Keep a camera with you for a few days and snap photos of things that offer glimpses of the goodness of creation. Create a slide show or photo collage and share it with friends or family. Remember to thank God for all the goodness he has given us in creation.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Saint Francis of Assisi



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Can you imagine giving away all of your possessions and choosing to live in poverty? That's just what Saint Francis of Assisi did. He was born into a wealthy family in Italy in the twelfth century AD. Early in his life, Francis wanted to be popular and wealthy. In his twenties he spent time as a prisoner of war and then had a serious illness. While he was recovering, he had a dream that urged him to follow Jesus.

Francis felt called to live more as Jesus had lived. He started to live in a simpler way. He began to spend more of his time praying, preaching, and giving to the poor. Francis's father, a successful cloth merchant, wasn't happy with his son's new way of life. After Francis sold some expensive cloth from the family business to raise funds to rebuild a chapel, his father took him to court. Francis repaid the money, gave back his fine clothes, and gave up his share of his family's wealth. Many people were attracted to Francis's preaching and simple manner of living and began to follow him. This community became the Franciscan order of religious.

Francis is known also for his love of creation, including animals. He is the patron saint of environmentalists. We celebrate his feast day on October 4.

1 THE HUMAN PERSON

KEY WORDS

human person
soul
Original Sin
temptation

Steven was a seven-year-old boy much like most other kids his age. There was one big difference though. Most days after school, when his friends went home to play, Steven went to the hospital for regular medical treatments. Steven had leukemia, a type of blood cancer.

When Steven and his family first found out about his illness, they were angry. They wondered why God would let this happen to him. He did not do anything to deserve it. But as time moved along, Steven and his family began to focus on the

Have you ever considered why bad things, like the serious illness of a child, often bring out the best in families and communities?



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goodness of the many people who offered them help. Family members, friends, classmates, teachers, church members, doctors, nurses, and many other people helped Steven and his family. Even people whom Steven had never met played a big role in helping him regain his health.

After a while Steven and his family were no longer angry with God. They no longer spent their time wondering why this had happened to Steven. They were just grateful to God for the help that came from so many good people.

Being Human

For all of us, life can be a joyful, exciting, confusing, and painful experience. There is so much to experience in a single lifetime that we often forget to stop and look at the meaning of the events that occur.

We also do not always understand why things happen the way they do, especially the difficult or painful experiences. Being human also means we are not perfect, and therefore sometimes we all make bad decisions.

Being human is not all dark and dreary though. It also means we are not alone and have many people in our lives—family, friends, and the people in communities to which we belong. Being human also means we are made in God's



PRAY IT!

God, everything you have created is good. Every human being is your child, including me. Like all human beings, I am good because I am made to be like you. Even when I do something wrong, you love me. Please give me the courage to do what you have created me to do. Help me see others as you see them. Help me forgive others as you forgive them. Help me love others as you love me. Amen.



FUN FACT

In the Book of Genesis, the name that God gives the first human being is Adam. This is an appropriate name because *Adam* comes from the Hebrew word for “man.” Eve’s name is just as appropriate, because it comes from a Hebrew word that means “life.”

image. We all have the ability to love and care for one another. For the most part, that is what we do. But the effects of sin often keep us from loving in the way God calls us to love—especially when it comes to loving the poor and vulnerable, as well as those with whom we don’t get along. We must continually develop our ability to love as God wants us to love. His grace and mercy help us in our efforts.

Body and Soul

The **human person** is a living being made up of both a physical body and an immortal, spiritual soul. A **soul** is the spiritual element that gives humans life and survives after death.

Having fun with friends gives us a sign of how God made us—to be in relationship with one another.



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Our soul is created by God at the moment of conception. After our death our soul will be reunited with our resurrected body at the final resurrection. It is important to remember that humans are not just physical bodies. God created us to be both body and soul, existing together in perfect unity.

You may notice that many young people look like their parents in some way. They might have similar-sounding voices or similar facial features. Sometimes they have the same color eyes or hair. That is because physical bodies are determined to a great extent by the parents' genes. When God made Adam, he formed the soil into his body and then breathed life into him (see Genesis 2:7). Like Adam, we also have God's breath or spirit within us. Each of us has a soul



Did You Know?

Not Just Our Souls

Because human beings are both physical and spiritual, the Church cares about all aspects of human life, not only our souls. For example, in 1891, Pope Leo XIII advocated that working people be paid appropriately and treated with dignity by their employers. During his papacy, Saint John XXIII wrote a letter that addressed human rights, freedom, and world peace. As Pope, in 1995 Saint John Paul II addressed a number of human life issues, such as abortion and the death penalty. In 2007 Pope Benedict even issued ten suggestions for driving to encourage us to be safe and responsible when we are on the road.

that comes from God and that is united with our bodies when we are conceived in our mothers' womb. Although our bodies will one day get old and die, our soul never will.

So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. . . . God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased.

Genesis 1:27,31

When God created Adam, he did not want him to be alone, so God created a companion for him. God does not want us to be alone, either. Just as the Trinity is a communion of Persons in loving relationship with one another, we are created to be in loving relationships with other people.

The biggest evidence of this is that God created human beings to be male and female. Men and women are created to be equal but still different. Men are particularly good at some things. Women are especially good at others. God created us so that men and women would need each other and bond together in close relationship. This is why the union of one man and one woman in marriage is directly imprinted on the human family by God's Law. The Creation accounts in the Bible explain why human beings need communities, especially families.



Think About It!

God is not male or female.
God is not a human being.
God does not even have the same kind of physical presence humans have. But you are made in the image of God. There is something special about you that is like God. What makes you like God? What can you do that is similar to what God does?

Original Sin

The Scripture account of Adam and Eve explains how human beings were meant to live and how we fell away from God's plan. Adam and Eve represent the first human beings. At first, Adam and Eve were at peace with God. Because of this, they were also at peace with every living thing on the earth. They were happy and free, and experienced no pain or suffering.

God had given Adam and Eve just one rule to follow: "You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad" (Genesis 2:16–17). However, tempted by the serpent, they thought that by eating from the tree, they could know what God knows. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. The first parents of the human race wrongly decided they could be happy without God and his guidance.

As a result, human beings were banished from the Garden of Eden. We separated ourselves from God. Because of Adam and Eve's choice, they and every human being since then—except Jesus and Mary—no longer had that same perfect relationship with God. We lost the freedom and the holiness we were meant to have.

This condition is called **Original Sin**. Original Sin means two things. First of all, it is the sin that Adam and Eve committed. Second, it is the sinful condition that all human beings have from birth. The first human beings' wrongdoing wounded them. Their

wound, or the condition of Original Sin, was passed on to every human being. The grace we receive in Baptism washes us clean of Original Sin and makes us adopted children of God the Father, but we still struggle with the temptation to sin.

A **temptation** is something that makes sinful things seem fun, exciting, or even good to do. Original Sin makes it hard for us to resist temptation and makes us prone to sin. For example, have you ever seen someone drop money from a pocket without realizing it? If no one was nearby, you might have felt the temptation to pick up the money and keep it. Original Sin is what makes us want to be selfish rather than do what is good. It makes us think of our own pleasure instead of doing what is right.

You might think that Original Sin is not fair. Original Sin is much like the sick boy in the introduction to this chapter. He did not do anything to deserve the disease he had. He also didn't have a choice about being sick. Similarly, how Original Sin is transmitted is a mystery we do not fully understand. But we do

“Everybody does it.”
The temptation to cheat is an example of how Original Sin affects all of us. But the truth is we were born to be good. As Jesus said, “The truth will set you free.”



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know that it is passed on from one generation to the next. Except for Jesus and his mother, Mary, Original Sin affects every person.

Even though we all have the wound of Original Sin, we are not born evil. We are still created in God's image and have the desire to be united with God and to be good. Even though Original Sin affects us all, it does not stop us from returning to God.

Coming from God, Heading toward God

Have you ever been away from home for a long time? If so, then you might know what it feels like to be homesick and want to return to the place where you are loved and things are familiar. This is also true in people's spiritual lives. Being with God is our true home. Returning to God is what will make us happy. Our worries and spiritual restlessness are kinds of spiritual homesickness.



LITURGY CONNECTION

Sharing in the Divinity of Christ

During Mass there comes a moment when the priest pours a little bit of water into the wine. As he does this, he whispers something that the assembly usually cannot hear. He says, "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity." This mixing of the water and wine is a gesture that reminds us that the Son of God, the Second Divine Person of the Trinity, became one of us. The priest is also saying that humans are supposed to share in the divinity of Christ. We do that by receiving the Eucharist and also by living our faith so one day we will once again be in union with God.



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An act of kindness is one way of being Christ's Body here on earth. When we help others, we are being the people God created us to be.

Human beings are all religious in the sense that we are all trying to find our spiritual homes. It is our job to help ourselves and others realize that being with God is our true home. This does not mean that God has left us. Even though we cannot physically see him, God is still with us.

There is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

Ephesians 4:6

Christ is the model of the perfect human being. It is our destiny to live as he did. By doing God's will, we can become like Christ—his image for others to



LIVE IT!

Respect for God's Image

Every human being is made in the image of God. Remembering this when dealing with other people, especially people you do not like, can make a big difference in your relationships. It is easy to see the good in your friends and in those who do nice things for you. But God asks us to be good even to those whom we do not like. For example, when people insult you, you might want to strike back in the same way and hurt them like they hurt you. But when you do this, you sink to their level. On the other hand, if you respond with understanding and kindness, you acknowledge that these people are worthy of the same respect you deserve. When you do this, you allow them to see the image of God within you.

see. The following prayer, thought to be written by Saint Teresa of Ávila, says it best:

Christ has no body now but yours,
 no hands but yours,
 no feet but yours.
 Yours are the eyes through which
 Christ's compassion must look
 out on the world;
 Yours are the feet with which
 He is to go about doing good.
 Yours are the hands with which
 He is to bless us now.



CHURCH HISTORY

Defending Humanity During War

During World War II (1939–1945), the world confronted a major threat to human life and dignity. Germany's Nazi Party did terrible things intended to wipe out the Jewish people, as well as people with disabilities and anyone they thought was homosexual. Germany and its allies also mistreated captured soldiers.

Pope Pius XII and the Vatican worked to save as many people as they could. Some were saved through diplomacy. Officials hid others in monasteries and convents in Rome. The Vatican even issued false baptismal certificates to protect Jews who might be discovered. All of this was dangerous work, because Italy fought on Germany's side. Historians believe the Vatican helped nearly 900,000 Jews and countless others escape capture.

8 ***THE BIBLE: COVENANTS***

KEY WORDS

Satan
Chosen People
Ten Commandments
New Covenant

Trust is an extremely important part of life. We trust people so routinely that we often do not even think about it. We trust that our parents will have food for us to eat. We trust that our teachers will tell us the correct information. We trust that other drivers will obey the traffic laws. We trust that our friends will keep our private talks a secret. To ensure this trust, we sometimes make promises to each other.

Trust cannot be given all at once. Trust takes time, and it must be earned. How can you earn a friend's trust? How can someone earn your trust?



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Imagine what life would be like if you could trust no one. What would be different about getting in a car? How would your friendships change if you could not trust anyone with your secrets? What would it be like if you could not count on your parents to provide for you? Sooner or later you would probably become isolated and lonely. You would travel less, talk less, and rely on others less.

Fortunately, God is not like that. God is someone we can trust. Trusting God brings us closer to him. Throughout history he has made promises that he keeps. Yet we human beings have not always kept our part of the bargains. When we don't keep our promise, things fall apart. Despite our sins and weaknesses, God is always faithful in his promise to save us from sin and death. We can trust God because he has always been faithful to his promises.

God Gives Second Chances

We can read about many promises in the Bible that are part of salvation history. Some promises are between people or groups of people. But the most important promises are the ones between God and people. These are sacred



PRAY IT!

God, people are not perfect. My parents make mistakes. My friends do not always do what they promise. Teachers tell us to act one way, but even they sometimes act differently. We human beings are not perfect. We are easily tempted to sin. Guide me in choosing the path of goodness. Help me to trust in your righteousness. Even though I do not always understand your ways, I know you keep your promises. Amen.

A leap of faith is like jumping into the arms of God. We trust that he will always be there for us.



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agreements between God and human beings, called covenants, where everyone vows to keep a promise forever. Even in the account of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis we see a hint of the covenants that God will make and keep later on.

God created Adam and Eve to live in happiness with him forever. The only condition was that they were to obey him. God told Adam: "You may eat the fruit of any tree of the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day" (Genesis 2:16–17). Sadly Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree. As one consequence of their disobedience, they had to leave the Garden of Eden (see 3:23–24). Humans had separated themselves from God.

This does not mean God abandoned Adam and Eve to the power of sin and death. To the snake, God said: “I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring’s heel” (Genesis 3:15). Sacred Tradition teaches us that the snake represents **Satan**, the fallen angel who is always looking for ways to tempt us to disobey God. God predicted that Eve’s offspring would crush the snake’s head, destroying his power forever. Tradition teaches us that the offspring of the woman is Jesus Christ. So as early as the story of Adam and Eve, God promised to deliver us from the power of sin and death.



LIVE IT!

Keeping the Covenant with God

In a covenant all sides make commitments and promises to one another. As one of God’s children, what are your responsibilities to him? On a sheet of paper, list everything that comes to mind when you think about your commitment to God. Be as specific as possible. Then look back at your list. What responsibilities are you meeting well? Which commitments need more of your attention? What promises can you add to make your faith more real and present in your daily life? For example, maybe you can set aside five minutes in the morning to pray for God’s guidance throughout the day. Or you might add an examination of conscience to your routine before bed. Everything you do to become more aware of God’s call each day will help you to grow in a loving relationship with him.



FUN FACT

In Scripture when God makes a covenant with someone, the person's name is often changed. For example, Abram became Abraham and his wife, Sarai, became Sarah. Jacob took on the name Israel. The name change symbolizes the new relationship with God.

Unfortunately, as time passed, people continued to sin. God saw the violence and corruption that filled the earth. He told Noah that he would destroy the whole earth and all its people because of their sinfulness (see Genesis 6:9–12). Chapters 7 and 8 in the Book of Genesis tell how God wiped out all the human wickedness from the earth with a flood. Noah, who had “found favor with the LORD” because of his righteousness (Genesis 6:8), was spared. After the Flood, only he and his family remained.

God then made a covenant with Noah, the first covenant described in the Bible (see Genesis 9:1–17). God promised Noah that he would never again destroy the human race with a flood. The Bible identifies the rainbow as the symbol of that covenant.

“When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth.”

Genesis 9:16

Despite his people's sins, God still promised salvation. Like a good parent, God cared for his children. He gave them a second chance. Today we know that even when we do something wrong, God still loves us. He continues to give all of us second chances.

God's Covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David

Throughout salvation history God has called certain individuals to lead his people back to him. The first was Abraham, the father of our faith, through whom God established his people. When God called Abraham, he and his wife, Sarah, were childless. They were also already old and had given up hope of having children (see Genesis 11:29–12:5).

God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to give him land and many descendants, who would be a blessing to all people (see Genesis 15:1–6 and 17:1–9). In return Abraham promised



Did You Know?

Other Promises in the Bible

We can read about many promises in the Bible and can learn from them. Here are a few:

- Ruth's promise to follow her mother-in-law (see Ruth 1:6–17)
- God's promise that he knows us completely (see Psalm 139)
- Isaiah's promise to be God's messenger (see Isaiah 6:1–8)
- Peter's promise never to deny Jesus (see Mark 14:27–31, 66–72)

to be faithful to God. Amazingly Abraham and Sarah had a son in their old age. The son's name was Isaac. Abraham's many descendants became God's **Chosen People**, the Israelites.

At the end of the Book of Genesis, we find that the Israelites had to migrate to Egypt because of a food shortage. Eventually Egypt's ruler, the Pharaoh, forced the Israelites to become slaves. When the Israelites cried out to God to deliver them, God called a man named Moses to lead them to freedom. Moses confronted Pharaoh and through God's power led the Israelites out of slavery (see Exodus, chapters 1–14).

While the Israelites traveled through the desert, they stopped at a holy mountain, Mount Sinai. Through Moses, God appeared to them there and made a new covenant—called the Mosaic Covenant or the Sinai Covenant—with his Chosen People. He promised to be their God and protect them if they would be his people and obey his Law. Moses received the Law from God and brought it to the Israelites. The **Ten Commandments** summarize the Law Moses received. Through the Law, God told the Israelites how he wanted them to live. The Law guided all parts of the Israelites' daily lives. Following the



Think About It!

A covenant spells out the relationship we have with someone. When we are in a good, healthy relationship, each person in the relationship fulfills his or her commitments to the other person. What are the most important relationships in your life? What are your commitments in those relationships? How well are you keeping them? A sign of your covenant with God can be found in how well you are keeping your important commitments to other people.

Law was the Israelites' responsibility under their covenant with God (see Exodus, chapters 19–20).

We find one other important covenant in the Old Testament: a promise that God made to King David. David wanted to build a temple to honor God. But through Nathan the prophet, God told David not to build him a temple. Rather, God said, David's son would be the one to build him a temple (see 2 Samuel 7:1–16). Then God promised something more. He told David: "You will always have descendants, and I will make your kingdom last forever. Your dynasty will never end" (2 Samuel 7:16).

If you know salvation history, you might spot a problem with this covenant that God made with David. After nineteen of David's descendants ruled as kings of Israel, the kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians. A descendant of David would never again sit on the throne in Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel. But Scripture and Tradition teach us that God's covenant with David was not about an earthly kingdom. God's promise was about the eternal Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ was a descendant of David (see Matthew 1:1). He established the Kingdom of God and then ascended into Heaven to rule there as the Prince of Peace forever. When we turn to the New Testament, we can see that all of God's covenants in the Old Testament are fulfilled, and all his promises have come true.



LITURGY CONNECTION

Eucharistic Prayer IV

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a short dialogue between the priest and the people. The priest urges us to lift our hearts in prayer and to give thanks to God. After we agree to join with him in prayer, the priest prays a long prayer that explains exactly why we are praising and thanking God in this Eucharist. This long prayer, which includes the consecration of the bread and wine, making them the Body and Blood of Christ, is called the Eucharistic Prayer.

There are four Eucharistic Prayers. Eucharistic Prayer IV retells the story of salvation. It recounts the disobedience that lost God's friendship, but also affirms that God never gave up on his people. Over and over again, God offered them covenants—promises that he would be with them and that in him they would find salvation.

The New Covenant

All through history God has been faithful to his promise of salvation. When we human beings have gone astray, he has sent his prophets to guide us. In his greatest act of salvation, God became one of us. In the New Testament, we can read how he fully revealed himself by sending his only Son. Through his Son, Jesus Christ, he established the covenant forever (see Luke 22:19–20). This is sometimes called the **New Covenant**, but it is really the fulfillment of the covenants God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. You will read much more about Jesus in later chapters.

The Good News that God's promise of salvation was now fulfilled in Jesus Christ was preached to everyone. Jesus gave his Apostles the power to carry on his mission. They passed their work on to others. They passed it down too. This continued through the centuries to us

today. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church and will do so until Christ returns. When Christ returns, God's promise of salvation will be complete.

And the LORD said to himself, "I will not hide from Abraham what I am going to do. His descendants will become a great and mighty nation, and through him I will bless all the nations."

Genesis 18:17–18



CHURCH HISTORY

Mary, Mother of the Church

Mary was named Mother of the Church by Pope Paul VI in 1964. This was a new title for Mary, but it acknowledged something the Church, the Body of Christ, has always known: Mary is our Mother. Mary is Mother of the Church because she is the Mother of Christ. At Baptism we are made part of Christ's Body, the Church.

Even before Mary was officially given this title, many popes had spoken of Mary as Mother of the Church, beginning with Pope Leo XIII. Later, both Pope Saint John XXIII and Pope Paul VI spoke of Mary in this way.

For example, in his teachings on Mary, Pope Paul VI often refers to the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* from Vatican Council II, which called her "a most beloved mother" (53). In a speech at the end of the third session of the Council, he proclaimed her "Mary, Mother of the Church."

This title for Mary was adopted enthusiastically by the Church. Many new parishes established after Vatican Council II have taken the name "Mary, Mother of the Church."

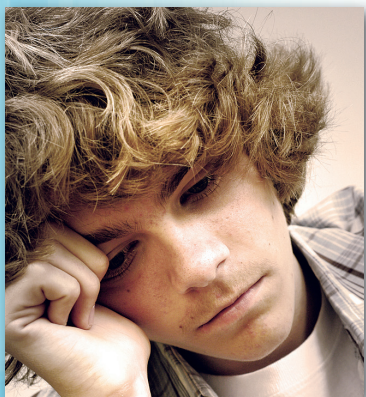
9 FAITH: RESPONDING TO GOD

KEY WORDS

faith
creed
monotheistic

Some of life's most difficult questions are matters of faith. God does not expect us to have all the answers.

Often people say you need to have faith. They might say, "Keep the faith" or "Have faith in God." Has anyone ever asked if you have faith in God? Have you ever considered what your response would be? Maybe your first thought was, "Yes, of course I do!" If so, that is a fine answer. Maybe this is the first time you have ever thought about it, and you do not have a quick answer. That is okay too. Just considering the question is one of the first steps of faith. This chapter will look into what having faith means. Afterward, you may realize you have more faith than you thought you did.



What Is Faith?

Throughout history God has called upon people to follow his will. **Faith** is the way people respond to God's call. On a simple level, faith means a belief in God. For Christians it means more than

that. Faith is believing and accepting that God made himself known to us through his words and actions, especially through Jesus Christ. It is accepting God's truth with our minds. Faith is something that guides our entire lives.

In a way it would be simple to say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who is our Savior." It would be easy if that was all that was required for salvation. But having faith also requires us to live our lives based on this belief. The following short story illustrates this point.

A two-year-old boy is playing on a wooden playground structure that has all sorts of slides, swings, and ropes to climb. He runs toward a ledge near where his father is standing. As he gets closer to the ledge, his father smiles and moves closer, because he knows exactly what is going to happen. The little boy stops at the edge of the five-foot drop and starts to laugh. Then he throws his arms up over his head and flings his body into the air toward his father. As the dad has done a hundred times before, he reaches out and catches the boy. The boy is not even finished with his laughing before he runs back around to make the jump again.

To leap into his father's arms, the boy has to have faith in his father. He has to trust that his father will catch him.



PRAY IT!

Jesus, I am like the man who cried out to you: "I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!" (Mark 9:24). Sometimes it seems like my faith is as small as a mustard seed. But with even that much faith, you said I could do anything. With you nothing is impossible. I place my trust in you, knowing you will not disappoint me. Amen.



FUN FACT

When God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would be the parents of many descendants, they were so old that Sarah laughed at the thought. But Abraham and Sarah kept their faith in God. When their son was born, they named him Isaac, a Hebrew name that means “laughter.”

Leaping is just the final step in his act of faith. Because he believes and trusts his father, it is the natural thing to do. A person with faith in God is like the child who leaps into the hands of his father.

Faith Is a Gift Freely Chosen

Faith is necessary for salvation and is a gift from God. Someone cannot have faith without the Holy Spirit, who helps us see our need for God. Before a person can have this gift of faith, he or she must first have the freedom to choose it. Being faithful can be achieved only by someone who understands and freely chooses to believe in God and his Church.

You might think, “My parents force me to go to Mass and practice my faith, so how can I ever freely choose it?” Think of it this way. What would you do

A leap of faith is like jumping into the arms of God. We trust that he will always be there for us.



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if someone offered you a box and said that if you accepted it, you would carry it around for the rest of your life? You would want to know what was in the box before you made a decision, right? Without looking inside it, you cannot really make a choice. The box is like the faith God wants to give you. It often comes to you through the words and examples of your parents. If you are ever going to choose to accept the faith God offers, you must look into it. You have to learn about it before you accept it. Only then can you really make a free and informed decision.

Faith Is Believing

Having faith means you believe, or accept something to be true. Christians believe in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. At Mass, we declare our core beliefs when we pray the Nicene Creed. A



Did You Know?

The “Heart” of Our Beliefs

The word *belief* can be traced back to Old English and Old High German words that mean “to hold dear and to love.” The word *creed* can be traced back to two Latin words, *cor* and *do*. *Cor* means “heart” and *do* means “I give.” So when we say our creed, or our beliefs, we are doing more than just saying the things that we think. We are stating what is in our hearts. A creed is the set of beliefs to which our hearts are devoted.

creed is an official statement of one's faith, or what one believes.

Believing is also an act of the entire Church. Don't confuse Church—with a capital C—with a building. The Church is the community of faithful people who put their faith in Jesus Christ. In a way your first Church is your family. It is the Church that teaches you. It is the Church that is a role model for you. It is the Church that supports and nourishes your own faith. Without your family and the Church, there is no one to pass on the faith.

Belief is not the end of the road when it comes to having faith. In fact, believing is only the beginning. Belief is the foundation on which the rest of our faith is built.

Faith Is Trusting

Having faith also means you trust. Trust is when you confidently turn control of your life (or part of your life)

The words from the beginning of the Nicene Creed are probably familiar to you. Check out the rest of the Creed in appendix A, Catholic Prayers.



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over to someone or something else with hope. If you have ever worked on a school project with others, you know what it is like to trust. Working hard on your part of the project, you trust that your partners will complete their parts. You have given some of the control over your grade to your partners with hope that they will do their jobs.

When we trust God, we acknowledge that we cannot ever be truly happy without him. We can do our part, but without God, our “project,” which is our lives, will never be complete. So having faith means we trust God—we put God in control of our lives.

Trusting God is a required ingredient of faith. Trusting him does not mean things will always go the way we want them to go. Human beings are not perfect. We often bring much misery and pain upon ourselves. By trusting God and allowing him to lead our lives, we will give and receive more joy and happiness in this world and in the next.

I assure you that if you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this hill, “Go from here to there!” and it will go. You could do anything!

Matthew 17:20



Think About It!

Being a faith-filled person does not mean all your questions will be answered. It also does not mean you will never have another doubt. God is mysterious, and it is part of your human nature to ask questions about who he is and about our faith in him. But your questions can bring you closer to God. How could bringing your doubts and questions to God in prayer be helpful in your spiritual life? What questions do you have for God?

Faith Is Doing

Finally, having faith means you do something about it. Doing means you act upon what you believe. In fact, without the doing, someone could argue that you don't have faith at all. You may have heard the saying "The proof is in the pudding." This means we see the true significance of ideas or beliefs when they are put into action. This applies to faith too. Your actions make real your belief and trust in God. The Letter of James says it best, as follows:

My friends, what good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it? Can that faith save you? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!"—if you don't give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead. (2:14–17)

Mother Teresa used the words "Jesus in disguise" to describe those who are most in need of our help. Like Mother Teresa, when we reach out to others, we are putting our faith into action.



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Faith in God Alone

Christianity is **monotheistic**, meaning we believe in only one God. Yet even we who call ourselves Christians do not always completely place our trust in God alone. Instead we sometimes look to money or worldly power for our protection. We can also spend too much time and attention trying to get lots of stuff. We begin to think we can be happy only when we have the best sports equipment, the newest video games, or whatever new thing catches our eye. Those things become like false gods when we forget that our true happiness can be found only in God. None of us is perfect, but as our faith in God grows, we will not allow anyone or anything to substitute for him. God is our true home, and we will be truly satisfied only by doing his will and being with him.

**Israel, remember this! The LORD—
and the LORD alone—is our God.**

Deuteronomy 6:4



LITURGY CONNECTION

Prayer of the Faithful

Every time we celebrate Mass, we offer our petitions, or requests, in what is called the Prayer of the Faithful. Here we ask God to fulfill our needs. In doing so we trustfully place our needs in God's hands. It does not mean that we expect God to give us all that we ask for.

God does not grant our every wish. We do not always understand why. Nonetheless, we trust that he will provide what is best for us. Next time during the Prayer of the Faithful, offer your own needs to God and trust that he will provide what is best for you.

Some Christians have chosen to give up all they have to place their faith in God alone. Some missionaries, for example, leave their homes to work in the poorest areas of the world. They choose to abandon the comfort and security of their homes. Led by their belief in the Good News of Jesus Christ, they trust God's call and act upon it.

Even Jesus was tempted to rely on something other than God. When he was in the desert, the devil tried to convince Jesus to look for material things and worldly power to save himself. Jesus replied "Go away, Satan! The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'" (Matthew 4:10).



Small Things, Great Love

Mother Teresa is a wonderful inspiration for those who want to be faithful to God. But the stories about saintly people like her overwhelm many people. Many might think, "I could never be as great as she was," and then decide to do nothing. Mother Teresa did not see herself as someone great. She saw her work as simple—not easy, just simple. She read the Gospels. She believed in Jesus' call to serve those who are the neediest in our world. She trusted that God would help her. Then she went out and did it. When asked about her work, she emphasized that faithful people did not have to help the entire world. They just needed to help one person. She said, "We do no great things, only small things with great love." What is a small thing you can do with great love?

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Blessed Mother Teresa



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Blessed Mother Teresa was a woman of great faith. She was born Gonxha Agnes Bojaxhiu in 1910 in Skopje, Macedonia. At age eighteen, she joined the Sisters of Loreto and took the name Teresa after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Teresa served as a school teacher in Calcutta, India, for almost twenty years.

Following an encounter with Christ in which she heard him tell her, “Come, be my

light,” Teresa was inspired to help those who suffered from the most extreme poverty. In 1948, after a few years of prayer and determination, Mother Teresa received permission to leave her convent to work with the poor in the streets of Calcutta. She soon formed the Missionaries of Charity, who set up hospitals and homes for the dying. In 1979 this “saint of the gutters” was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. By the 1990s the Missionaries of Charity could be found all over the world, helping homeless people, abused women, and orphans, as well as those suffering from AIDS, drug addiction, and other illnesses.

Mother Teresa died in 1997. She left behind a thriving order of priests, nuns, and laypersons devoted to the service of the neediest people in our world. Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa in 2002. After she died, her private letters revealed that she had overcome many years of spiritual doubt and anguish. Despite these feelings, she trusted God and kept hard at work at her mission.

10 **THE BIBLE: THE PROPHETS**

KEY WORD

Messiah

Good friends encourage us to be our best selves. Friends who encourage us to take the wrong path are not true friends at all.

We all get on the wrong path of life sometimes. For some people the wrong path means holding on to anger and resentment. For other people the wrong path could mean telling little lies that turn into bigger and bigger lies. And for others the wrong path could be as serious as developing an addiction to alcohol, drugs, or pornography.

What kind of friend would you want to have if you start going down a wrong path of life? A friend

who is brave and honest enough to tell you that what you are doing is wrong and that you need to change? Or a friend who pretends that everything is okay? The friend who is honest enough to tell you that you need to change is a true friend indeed. That friend loves you so much that he or she is willing to risk your friendship by telling you a



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truth that you need to hear, even if you do not want to hear it.

The prophets were the true friends of the Chosen People. When God called the prophets to tell the Israelites to change their lives, they bravely spoke the truth. Many times this caused trouble for the prophets because the kings and the people did not want to change. The prophets were ridiculed and imprisoned. Some even had their lives threatened. Yet they were faithful in speaking God's Word because of their great love for God and his people.

“Then I heard the Lord say, ‘Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?’

I answered, ‘I will go! Send me!’”
Isaiah 6:8

The Non-Writing Prophets

A prophet is someone who speaks for God. In the earliest parts of salvation history, there was no need for prophets, because God spoke directly to people like Adam and Eve, Noah, and Abraham. But as salvation history progressed, God spoke directly to special individuals only—the prophets, who then carried his message to his



PRAY IT!

Lord, help me to go into the world to care for those who are oppressed and needy, to speak out against injustice, and to proclaim the Good News. Grant me the gifts of the prophets who have gone before me.

Grant me courage.

Moses, pray for me.

Grant me humility.

Jeremiah, pray for me.

Grant me trust.

Isaiah, pray for me.

All you holy people, pray for me! Amen.



FUN FACT

The most reluctant prophet in the Bible is Jonah. When God called him to go to Nineveh with his message, Jonah ran in the opposite direction!

people. Moses was the first of these special people. Joshua was another, followed by the judges. All these people can be considered prophets. You can read more about them in chapter 5, "The Bible: The Old Testament," of this handbook.

When Israel was ruled by kings, the prophets were a very important part of salvation history. It seemed that the more the kings focused on the things that kings do—fighting wars, building forts and cities, making laws—the more they forgot their covenant with God. So God kept sending prophets to remind the kings to keep their covenant with him. Today we can read the words of some of these prophets in their books, found in the fourth section of the Old Testament. But some prophets who preached during the time of the kings do not have their own books. We learn about them in the historical books of the Old Testament. Those prophets are called the non-writing prophets. Let's take a closer look at the most famous non-writing prophets, Elijah and Elisha.

We read about Elijah in the First Book of Kings. God sent Elijah to speak to King Ahab. Ahab was a king of Israel, the northern kingdom. He was one of the worst kings we learn about in the Bible. Ahab married a foreign woman, Jezebel, who became queen. Ahab and Jezebel worshipped Baal and Asherah, a false god and goddess (see 1 Kings 16:29–33). This is what the Bible says about Ahab:

“He did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel before him” (1 Kings 16:33). So God sent Elijah to confront this evil king and queen.

To prove to Ahab, Jezebel, and the people that the Lord is the true God, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest (see 1 Kings, chapter 18). In the contest, Elijah and the prophets of Baal each made altars and piled them with wood and a sacrifice. Then they each prayed to their god to light the fire. The prophets of Baal prayed and prayed, but nothing happened. Then Elijah prayed, and the Lord incinerated the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones



LIVE IT!

Live the Prophetic Mission

Whom does God call to be a prophet today? You! By virtue of your Baptism, you are called to participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministry of Christ. That means you don't need to be an ordained priest to share the Good News with the world. You can witness to Christ through every word and action, in every circumstance in which you find yourself.

How can you be a prophet to your community today? What messages about faithfulness to God's Law do your friends, family, or school need to hear? What social causes need you to speak out? Whom can you reassure about God's love in the midst of suffering? Take some time today to pray for the courage to live your faith publicly and to share your faith with others.



LITURGY CONNECTION

The Prophets Today

In our liturgy the prophets still speak the Word of God to us today.

During Advent we often read the beautiful messianic prophecies of the prophet Isaiah. Other prophets we hear during Advent include Jeremiah, Baruch, and Micah.

During the Sundays of Lent, we hear the words of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and, during the Easter Vigil, the six readings include the words of three prophets: Isaiah, Baruch, and Ezekiel.

During Ordinary Time we read many different sections of the Old Testament, including the prophets.

The only time we do not read from the Old Testament at Mass is during the Easter season. At that time the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles, which recounts how the Apostles spread the Good News of Christ's Resurrection, which was the fulfillment of the hopes of all the prophets.

of the altar! No one could doubt whose god was real. Elijah also performed several miracles, including bringing a boy back to life. You can read about Elijah in 1 Kings, chapters 17–19, and 2 Kings, chapters 1–2.

Elijah recruited Elisha to be his helper (see 1 Kings 19:19–21). At the end of his life, Elijah was taken into Heaven in a chariot of fire. Then Elisha took Elijah's cloak to wear (see 2 Kings 2:1–18), symbolizing that Elijah's role as prophet passed to Elisha. So Elisha became a mighty prophet who performed many miracles. Through the power of God, Elisha multiplied olive oil for a poor widow, multiplied loaves of bread to feed hungry prophets, and brought a dead boy back to life. (Elisha's miracles may remind you of Jesus' miracles.) You can read about Elisha in 2 Kings, chapters 2–8. Through the words and actions of Elijah and Elisha, we learn that God punishes evil people and takes care of those who are suffering and poor.

The Classical Prophets

In the Old Testament, the words and actions of sixteen prophets are recorded in sixteen books named after them. These prophets are sometimes called the classical prophets or the writing prophets. Let's look at one minor prophet, Amos, and one major prophet, Ezekiel. (See the Did You Know? sidebar below for an explanation of these terms.)

Amos was the first of the classical prophets. He prophesied in Israel almost eight hundred years before the birth of Christ. We know little about the life of Amos. He was not a full-time prophet; rather, he was a shepherd and tree pruner (see Amos 7:14–15). God called him from his simple life to challenge the injustice in Israelite society. During this time some very wealthy people lived in Israel, but so did some very poor people. This injustice went against God's covenant with his Chosen People.



Did You Know?

Major Prophets and Minor Prophets

The Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are quite long, so these three prophets are called the major prophets. The other prophets, whose books are shorter, are called the minor prophets. These labels do not mean that the major prophets are more important than the minor prophets. They only describe the length of the books of the prophets.

Amos was a clever preacher. In chapter 1 of the Book of Amos, we read how he condemned the sinfulness of foreign nations. So his listeners might have been thinking, “Oh good, he’s not talking about us.” But by chapter 2, we can see that Amos began to condemn the sins of the people of Israel. He did not hold back at all:

The LORD says, “The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and for this I will certainly punish them. They sell into slavery honest people who cannot pay their debts, the poor who cannot repay even the price of a pair of sandals. They trample down the weak and helpless and push the poor out of the way.” (Verses 6–7)

As terrible as the sins of the other nations were, God considered the sins of Israel even worse because they had the advantage of their covenant relationship with him. Amos continued his prophecies, predicting the destruction of Israel (see Amos, chapter 6). His words were mostly words of condemnation and doom. But his book concludes with hope-filled words, saying that God would rebuild the nation after its destruction (see Amos 9:11–15).

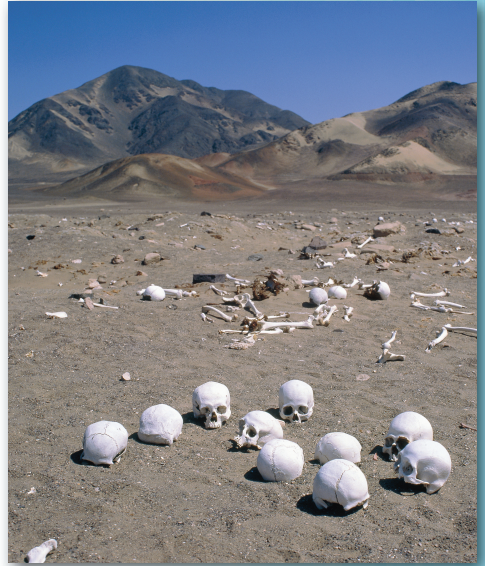
Ezekiel lived about two hundred years after Amos. He was a priest in the very first group of people taken to Babylon during the Exile. He did all of his prophesying from this foreign country. Jerusalem and the Temple had not yet been destroyed, so Ezekiel’s early preaching was a warning that the final

end of the kingdom was coming. To get his point across, God had Ezekiel perform symbolic acts. Ezekiel had to lay on his side for 430 days to symbolize the number of years the people of Israel and Judah would be punished. He had to bake his food on cow dung to symbolize that the Israelites would eat unclean food during the Exile (see Ezekiel 4:4–15). He even had to cut off all the hair on his head and then burn a third of it, chop up a third of it, and scatter a third in the wind. This symbolized how the Chosen People would be killed and scattered by the Babylonians (see 5:1–12).

The Book of Ezekiel isn't all doom and gloom though. The last third of the book contains many hopeful prophecies that God would rescue his people after their punishment. Ezekiel described God as the Good Shepherd who would rescue his sheep after the destruction (see Ezekiel 34:11–31). In another famous prophecy, Ezekiel saw dry bones coming back to life:

God said to me, "Mortal man, the people of Israel are like these bones. They say that they are dried up, without any hope and with no future.

When I open the graves where my people are buried and bring them out, they will know that I am the LORD. I will put my breath in them,



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The Prophet Ezekiel assured the people that God is not a God of death but of life and hope. Jesus, the Son of God, fulfilled these promises.

bring them back to life, and let them live in their own land. Then they will know that I am the LORD.” (37:11, 13–14)

As a priest, Ezekiel was very interested in the Temple in Jerusalem. The last chapters of his book describe a vision that the Temple will be rebuilt. Because the Temple is a symbol of God’s presence with his Chosen People, this vision is a promise that God has not abandoned his people.



THINK ABOUT IT!

The biblical prophets called the people to return to God when they began to worship false gods and disobey God’s Law. Then during the Exile, the prophets also reassured the people that God had not abandoned them. If the prophets were alive today, what societal situations do you think God would call them to address? What false idols would God tell them to warn us against?

The Hope for a Messiah

Through their words and actions, the prophets prepared the Chosen People for the coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. They reminded the people to show their faith in God by following the Law and the covenant. They told the people about God’s love and forgiveness. They urged the people to take responsibility for their actions and to ask God to forgive their sins. These are teachings that Jesus Christ emphasized and fulfilled. But the most important way the prophets prepared people for the coming of Christ was by telling them that God would send a savior, who would also be called the **Messiah**. *Messiah* is a Hebrew word

that means “anointed one” (the Greek word *Christ* means the same thing).

Let’s look at one prophet, the prophet Isaiah, to see what he revealed about the Messiah. Isaiah was a very famous writing prophet whose book contains not only the words of the original Isaiah but also the words of some of his later followers. The original Isaiah lived during the period when the Assyrians were invading Israel and Judah. His words are recorded in the first thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah. Then during the Babylonian Exile, a follower of Isaiah (sometimes called Second Isaiah) comforted the Chosen People with a hopeful message. His words are recorded in Isaiah, chapters 40–55. Finally, after the Israelites returned from Exile and resettled in the Promised Land, another follower of Isaiah (sometimes called Third Isaiah) challenged them to be faithful to their covenant with God. His words are recorded in Isaiah, chapters 56–66.

All three Isaiahs offered prophecies that were fulfilled in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. For example, the Book of Isaiah foretold that a virgin would give birth to a child named Emmanuel, meaning “God is with us” (see Isaiah 7:14). Isaiah also explained that the Messiah would be filled with the Lord’s Spirit for his public ministry: “To bring good news to the poor, / To heal the broken-hearted, / To announce release to

captives, / . . . to comfort all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:1–2). And several passages in Isaiah describe a servant who would be beaten, insulted, and finally put to death for the forgiveness of our sins (see 50:4–9, 52:13–53:12).

As we know, all of these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He was the Son of God who became man and was born of a virgin, Mary. The angel Gabriel told Mary that Jesus would be called Emmanuel (the Son of God) (see Luke 1:34–38). The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his Baptism (see Mark 1:10). In fact, Jesus began his public ministry by reading that same passage of Isaiah 61:1–2 in the synagogue, concluding, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read” (Luke 4:21). And we now understand that Jesus was the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah—the servant who was beaten, insulted, and crucified for the forgiveness of our sins (see Mark 15:16–20, Matthew 26:26–28, Luke 24:44–47).

It is amazing to see how prophets like the three Isaiahs clearly described Jesus and his mission. Through them, God prepared the Chosen People for the completion of his plan of salvation, through the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ.

“The LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.”

Micah 6:8



CHURCH HISTORY

Prophetic Missionaries and Saints in Latin America

Beginning in the 1500s, Europeans sailed to Latin America to colonize the lands and conquer the native peoples. They were accompanied by missionaries who sought to share the Gospel of Christ with the Indians. Many missionaries cared for the poor and sick, and they worked to defend and protect the native peoples as well as the African slaves the Europeans were transporting to the New World.

Saint Martin de Porres, the illegitimate son of a freed slave and a Spanish noble, personally experienced the cruel treatment of the lower classes in his native Peru. He dedicated his life to caring for the poor and mistreated in Peru. Saint Peter Claver, a Spanish missionary working in Colombia, was horrified by the plight of African slaves who were brought to Cartagena in unspeakable conditions. He tended to their physical needs, but he also actively and publicly defended their rights. And Bartolomé de las Casas, another Dominican friar and Spanish missionary, was an outspoken defender of the Indians who were suffering at the hands of European colonizers. His message was simple: You will win over many more converts to Christ if you treat them with respect and dignity.

Can you think of other saints and holy people who, like the prophets, called for justice in their societies?