

## **Basics of Catholicism**

### **Life in the Church**

Although we have not finished the topics of this series, I am taking a moment to verge into the basics of living the faith. This topic may seem basic or even obvious to some, yet, many of the ways that a person within the Church can live their faith is unknown to most. This topic is designed to explore the many different ways that a person can live their Catholic faith starting with the basics and moving into more nuanced ways.

#### **Basics of living the faith:**

The Catholic Church has set basics for the life of any Catholic. These basics come from two sources, the mandate of Jesus and the precepts of the faith. The basic mandate of Jesus is to become his disciple and to make more disciples through baptism (Matthew 28:16-20). These two commands form the basics of the faith from which everything else is built upon. The first, and most important, is for each person to choose to be a disciple of Jesus. This command is spelled out in the Great Commandment: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The rest of the commands, precepts, and options given by the Church express the different ways in which a person can fulfill these commands. The second part of it is the express command to all Christians. All Christians are commanded by Jesus to go and make new disciples through Baptism. The Christian shows the strength of their faith through the conversion of others and their desire to bring people to salvation.

The precepts of the Catholic Church govern the basic acts that any Catholic person must follow to be considered an actively practicing member of the Church. These precepts are the following:

- Attend Mass on Sundays and days of obligation.
- Confess your sins at least once a year.
- Receive the Eucharist at least once a year.
- Observe days of fasting and abstinence.
- Provide for the needs of the Church.

Let's examine each of these:

1. Attend Mass on Sundays and days of obligation. Mass is the central action of any Catholic. We worship God through the Mass, we pray with our community through the Mass, we show our support for the Church and the world through the Mass, and we build our faith by the celebration of the Sacraments. Mass is our central action as Catholics. In the words of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council: the liturgy is the source and summit of our faith. Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation express the most central elements of our faith and, when lived, become the joy of the Christian life. We want to celebrate the events of Jesus' life that make our lives make sense. We are a celebratory people who want to celebrate the gifts that God had given us. As a final note: Holy Days are obligatory when they fall on Tuesday through Friday unless the day is Christmas.

2. Confess your sins at least once a year. Jesus came to forgive us our sins and shows himself most fully in the forgiveness of sins. Therefore one of the most important parts of living our faith well is to be real about our sins, the need for God's help in the our sinfulness and challenges of life, and to acknowledge our need for forgiveness. The mandate to confess our sins once a year came from a time in which people would confess their sins often but never go to Communion. This, then, gave them the mandate to go to confession and receive Communion. Today this precept is still very vital as most Catholics go to confession only a handful of times in their lives.
3. Receive the Eucharist once a year. Much like the previous precept, the precept seems to not matter today. Yet, there was a time when people only received Communion a few times in their lives because they felt unworthy to receive Communion. The Church gave this command to ensure that the graces that come through the Sacraments were received by the people.
4. Observe days of fasting and abstinence. Often our lives are filled with so many things that we don't have time or a place for God. The days of fasting and abstinence are meant to shake up our lives a little so that we make room for God. Also, these days are meant to remind us of the spiritual good of fasting and abstinence as they teach us about our need for God and reliance on him. The only two days of fasting remaining on the calendar are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The days of abstinence are the Fridays of Lent. Some bishops have brought back the practice of Ember Days. These days are chosen by the Bishop as days of fasting and abstinence for a cause such as healing from the sex abuse crisis or to pray for peace in the world. Only the bishop can name Ember Days. Some of the faithful, including most of the religious, continue the practice of abstaining from meat on all Fridays of the year.
5. Provide for the needs of the Church. The church has many financial and physical needs. As the costs of everything continues to rise, churches continually need the support of their people to remain in operation. This precept is not directed towards the immediate financial needs but the good of the Church. Each member of the Church should believe in the good of the Church and be willing to support the mission and longevity of the Church and her mission. Without the support of the people, the mission to bring people to Christ disappears, the good of the Church reaching out to the world becomes non-existent, and the faith of the community diminishes. Support of the Church in her various forms is a necessary part of our belief in God and his providence in our lives. We need to continue to support the Church as a belief in her good and support her mission.

Beyond the basic commandments and precepts, living the Catholic faith requires a dedication to life with God. Someone who wishes to truly follow Christ models their life after him including following the moral code of God and the Church, continuing to study and grow your faith, living a life of witness to the world, and striving to put God first. All of these form the next level of living the faith.

### **Finding your place in the Church**

The most challenging part for any Catholic is finding a place within the Catholic Church. The process of finding our place is a combination of discernment and realizing our talents and how

they fit into the Church. Each person has a place where they can use their gifts and talents for the good of the Church. This includes anything from physical work taking care of the building or grounds to mental work like teaching to spiritual and emotional work like caring for people. The greatest challenge we face is hearing God's invitation towards a ministry or act of service. One of the most important aspects to growing our faith and making our faith meaningful in our lives is finding a place of service. Service means that we have given our lives to the Church and believe in its good for us and others.

**Ministries:** The technical liturgical ministries are only lector and Eucharistic minister. Many other forms of ministries exist within the Catholic Church including teaching, caring for others, homebound ministry, music, helping with setting up for Mass or decorating, administration, and more. Often we don't realize the many ways that we can serve our parish and one another.

**Organizations within the Church:**

**Third Orders:** the Catholic Church has many different religious orders and groups that continue the mission of the Church in their various charisms. The major orders, like the Carmelites, Benedictines, and Dominicans, have non-religious associated with them that live the charisms and support the mission of the order. The 1<sup>st</sup> order are those who are professed or on track for profession in the Order, i.e. monks, nuns, sisters, and friars. The 2<sup>nd</sup> order is those who live or work in the monastery or convent, follow the rules of the order by living their lives, but are not professed as religious. The 3<sup>rd</sup> order are laity who want to live the charism of the order, support the mission of the order, and take vows to live by the norms of the order but remain in the world with their current vocations.

**Confraternities and lay organizations:** throughout the world the Catholic Church has many different organizations that help to support the faithful and guide them to grow their faith and support the good of the Church. Confraternities and lay organization are groups of laity who gather together for mutual support and to work towards a cause. These organizations were very popular in the Middle Ages and were the main source of social support for the society. Some of these organizations included prayer groups, hospital aids, soup kitchen, orphanages, and more. Today the bulk of the lay organizations are prayer based such as those who pray the Rosary. Most of these organizations allow anyone to join but some are more specific. Each organization has their own rules and basic expectations.