

A REASON FOR HOPE

A Catholic Faith Study for Inmates

PART TWO
The Creed

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PART TWO The Creed

*“Always be ready
to give an explanation
to anyone who asks
you for a reason
for your hope.”*

1 Peter 3:15

Nihil Obstat: Dr. Patrick Russell
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The Apostles' Creed

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

I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.

Amen.

A REASON FOR HOPE

Faith Study Instructions

The Creed

Part Two of the Faith Study contains:

- 1) *Introduction* to the Creed
- 2) *Study Sections* on the Creed
- 3) *Review Test* Pages

Begin the Study:

- Read each section on the Creed
- Do the “Review Test” for each section at the back of the book

Completing Part Two:

- Tear out carefully only the pages called “Review Test” after you have completed them.
- Review and correct these pages with your study coordinator.
- Receive a certificate of completion for the section of the Bible study you have completed.

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Introduction

The Faith of the Apostles

This study of the Catholic faith is based on the teachings contained in the *Apostles' Creed*. The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo* which means *I believe*. This ancient creed was often used at Baptism as a statement of what the Christian community believed. It contains the basic elements of the faith preached by the apostles. That is why it is called the *Apostles' Creed*. This is the faith that has been handed on carefully to each generation of Christians. It represents the common faith that has been taught by the Church through the centuries in every time and place. As the apostle Paul wrote: "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:5-6).

The Faith of the Early Church

St. Irenaeus (pronounced: *ear-a-nay-us*) lived from 130 A.D. to 200 A.D. During his lifetime Christians often suffered torture and death at the hands of the Roman emperors and others who misunderstood Christian faith. St. Irenaeus wrote two famous books explaining and defending the one true faith: *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. In *Against Heresies* he wrote:

*"Indeed, the Church though scattered throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, having received the faith from the apostles and their disciples...guards [this preaching and faith] with care, as dwelling in but a single house, and similarly believes as if having but one soul and a single heart, and preaches, teaches, and hands on this faith with a unanimous voice, as if possessing only one mouth."*¹

*"For though languages differ throughout the world, the content of the Tradition is one and the same. The Churches established in Germany have no other faith or Tradition, nor do those of the Iberians, nor those of the Celts, not those the East, of Egypt, of Libya, nor those established at the center of the world..."*²

*"We guard with care the faith that we have received from the Church, for without ceasing, under the action of God's Spirit, this deposit of great price, as if in an excellent vessel, is constantly being renewed and causes the very vessel that contains it to be renewed."*³

¹ St.Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1,10,1-2:PG 7/1, 549-552.

² St.Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1,10,1-2:PG 7/1, 552-553.

³ St.Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5,20,1:PG 7/2, 1177.

*"...the Son of God, who received power from the Father over our life, and after having received this brought it down to us who were far off from Him, when He appeared on earth and was conversant with men, mingling and mixing the Spirit of God the Father with the creature formed by God, that man might be after the image and likeness of God."*¹ St.Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 97

"This, beloved, is the preaching of the truth, and this is the manner of our redemption, and this is the way of life, which the prophets proclaimed, and Christ established, and the apostles delivered, and the Church in all the world hands on to her children. This must we keep with all certainty, with a sound will and pleasing to God, with good works and right-willed disposition."

¹ St.Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 98

The Faith through the Centuries

From these early Christian writings so close to the time of the apostles, we can see how dependable and true is the *deposit of faith* we have received today, even after so many centuries. This faith was given to the Church as a treasure. This treasure has been preserved for every generation down to our day so that we live by the same truth, the same faith that was taught by the apostles. Nevertheless, the Church's understanding of this faith has grown and become clearer. A great teacher of the early church, St. Ambrose, taught that the faith is like a seed that has within it all the branches of the tree that it will become. Christ left us the truth, but He also sent us the Holy Spirit to guide our understanding because our human minds can hardly take it in all at once. Over the centuries, the church through its teaching authority given to it by Christ, has helped humanity understand the deposit faith more clearly. The Church's authority to teach is called the *magisterium* (from the Latin word for teacher, *magister*). That is why we study with the Church, following the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Using this Study Book

As we study our faith that is contained in the *Creed* we also will read the Bible. Studying the *Creed* with the help of the Bible gives us a better understanding of who God is and what his plan is for us. It teaches us about God's undying love and care for his people. We learn from the Bible that God's love can change our lives just as it changed the lives of the apostles and the first Christians who often gave their lives for the faith we now believe in.

Not everyone can join a study group, so this study of our faith is designed to be used as a *self-study* for each person on his or her own time. It also can be used in group study when that is possible. Whether we study alone or with fellow Catholics, the truth is, we are never really alone. We always have God's Spirit with us to comfort and guide us. God never abandons us, because he holds us in his heart and loves us with an everlasting, unconditional love. The Bible tells us in *I John 4:16*, "*God is love.*" In fact, God is so much love that he created a whole world of people to love. Every person is a child of God and created to be loved by God and to share God's love with others. That is the good news which we call our faith.

Each time we begin and end a section of this study booklet, let us begin and end with a grateful prayer to the Holy Spirit who guides us. Nothing lasting can be done without prayer, because prayer is our life-line to God. God's Spirit will be with us every step of the way, touching our hearts and giving the light of understanding to our minds.

A Prayer

*"I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
for although you have hidden these things from the wise
and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.
Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will." Matthew 11:25-26*



1. I Believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #198-421)

GOD THE FATHER OF ALL

We begin just as we do with the Sign of the Cross: “*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...*” Our faith begins with God, the first person of the Trinity, who is our heavenly Father and the creator of all that exists in heaven and on earth. As we pray in the Eucharist, everything owes its life to God—the source of all life and holiness. That is why the Church’s official way of praying begins with “*God our Father*” and ends with the words “*through Jesus Christ your Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.*”

• **Bible Reading:** *Genesis, Chapter 1* (*God creates all things*)

This passage from *Genesis* describes how God’s love was so great that it overflowed into creating our world and all that is in it, including ourselves. No one but God has love as powerful as this. One of the most important things to remember about creation is that after God made all things, including the first human beings, he looked at them and *found them to be very good*.

In *Psalms* 104:24 we read, “*...the earth is full of your creatures.*” In fact, there is nothing on the earth or in the whole universe that has *not* been made by God. All of it is good from the smallest grain of sand on the sea shore to the most distant star in the sky. Nature helps us know God although God is invisible. The beauty of God’s creation gives us some idea of what God is like. If the sunset, or starry sky, or the ocean which we see are so beautiful what must God who made them be like?

All creatures exist because of God’s almighty power. He brought all creatures, including ourselves, into being. If we think about it, we know that there was a time when we did not exist. We are not alive because of our own power. It is God’s power that gives us life. Our life is a great gift that we owe to him. The answer to the human question: *Who am I?* is in the Bible. It teaches us that we were made in his image and likeness. Our great beauty and dignity (that no one can take from us) is that each of us is a child of God and belongs to one human family with God as our one Father. As God’s children we are made for this one purpose: *to know, love and serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in heaven*. What we have done, or allow others to do, with the gift of our life is another story. It is the story of choosing something other than God’s plan for us. It is the story of sin. Just as Adam and Eve sinned for the very first time in the garden, so has every human being since then repeated the same mistake of turning away from God, living as if God does not exist or does not matter. Yet the great Love that created us is greater than any sin we can commit.

GOD IS ONE AND ALMIGHTY

The Bible also reveals that there are not many gods but *one* God. God alone exists without beginning or end. Through God's *almighty power* he created all things and is Lord of human history. As Moses taught the people of Israel, God deserves our total obedience and love: "*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength*" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). What Moses taught was revealed to him from the burning bush by God himself when he asked for God's name: "*God replied, 'I am who am.' Then he added, 'This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you.'*" (Exodus 3:14). Just as human beings introduce themselves, God revealed his own name for the first time in human history. The Israelites kept his name so holy that they never said it out loud. It was spelled, like all Hebrew writing, without vowels: YHWH (Yahweh). What Moses learned and taught about God was that he was faithful (Exodus 3:6-12) and forgiving (Exodus 34:5-6). This God was the same God that Jesus revealed as "*my Father and your Father...my God and your God*" (John 20:17).

Jesus also revealed that there are three persons in one God. In other words, God is a *Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. Although this is a great mystery, St. Patrick found a simple way to teach the Trinity to the people of Ireland. He held up a three-leaf clover to show that even in nature we see signs of how something can be one and three at the same time. As Catholics we express our belief in the Trinity when we make the *Sign of the Cross* and say the *Creed*.

GOD THE FATHER OF JESUS

We look to Jesus as the greatest teacher because he showed us who God is and what God is like. If we carefully read each of the four Gospels (*Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*) we will notice that God the Father is at the center of everything Jesus said and did: "*...I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me*" (John 8:28). When Jesus prayed, he began with the word Father, or *Abba* in Aramaic, the language he spoke. *Abba* means more than our word father. It is even more personal than that. It means *papa*. When Jesus prayed he said: "*I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...*" (Luke 10:21). When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he told them,

*"This is how you are to pray:
'Our Father in heaven,...' "* (Matthew 6:9).

Jesus wanted us to realize that God is kind and merciful, that we do not have to fear him even when we have sinned. We can always return to him and find a father's welcome - *always*. Jesus told many stories about how much God loves us. One well-known story is often called "The Prodigal Son." However, as you read it notice that it also describes the father.

• **Bible Reading: Luke 15:11-32** (*A lost son and his forgiving father*)

The mind and heart of Jesus were totally focused on his heavenly Father. He was loyal to what God wanted him to do. He never swayed in his preaching about the goodness and mercy of God. For this reason Jesus went out of his way to talk and eat with sinners. He wanted them to know how much God loved them. He remained faithful to God even when it meant that he would make the religious authorities of his day angry with him. One day he entered the temple which was crowded with people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. Their disrespect for this sacred place made Jesus so angry that he chased the sellers and animals away, and overturned the tables of money. He shouted: "*...stop making my Father's house a marketplace*"

(John 2:16). Jesus wanted his Father's will to be done on earth just as it was done in heaven. This was the goal of his work on earth, the fire that burned in the heart and soul of Jesus. He would do and say whatever gave glory to God, even if it cost him his own life. In the end, Jesus knew that his love for God would bring about his death: "*This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life...*" (John 10:17).

Even though Jesus was God the Father's son, he also was a human being like us. Doing God's will was not always easy. On the night before he died, Jesus prayed alone to his Father in the Garden of Olives. He threw himself to the ground with sweat pouring from his body as he prayed.

- **Bible Reading:** *Luke 22:39-46* (Jesus accepts his Father's will)

GOD OUR FATHER

No matter *who* our human father was or *what* he was like, each of us has a true Father in heaven. It may be hard for us to picture God as a father if our own father was not loving or forgiving. But Jesus died so that we would never forget that our heavenly Father never changes in his love for us. It was God's plan to offer forgiveness to the people who had turned away from him. Out of the greatest crime ever committed—the *killing of God's own son*—came the greatest good, our salvation. As God's messenger, Jesus still prayed, "*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). At that moment Jesus prayed for those who executed him as well as for all of us whose sins put him on the cross.

- **Bible reading:** *Acts 10:34-43* (Peter explains God's saving plan)

God's power is very different than human power. Very often people use power to dominate others. It can give us great hope to know that if God could overcome the evil of his son's death, he certainly can bring good out of the mess we sometimes make of our lives. Paul talks about this in *Romans 8:28*: "*We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*" God is so faithful to us that the Bible calls him the *Rock*. We can depend on him to rebuild our lives because of his faithful love and forgiveness. No matter how badly we are treated by others, or what mistakes we ourselves have made, God is always there for us. Whenever turn away from our sins, and turn to God he is there to give us strength, just as there was for the person who wrote the following psalm:

- **Bible Reading:** *Psalms 40* (God hears and rescues us)

GOD AND PRAYER

Because of the teaching of Jesus and his example of prayer, we no longer need to be confused about who God is or what God is like. And, if we do not understand God, we do not really understand our own lives. That is because God is the beginning and end of everything. God is the reason we exist: "*For 'In him we live and move and have our being'*" (Acts 17:28). We owe everything we are and everything we have to God. It follows that we should give thanks to God. If we pay attention to the official prayers of Church, we will notice that they begin with "God our Father" and end with the words "through Jesus Christ your son." Jesus, *God-made-man*, is the one who brings us to his Father in prayer. Just as he taught his disciples to pray, his Holy Spirit now teaches us how to pray now. It also is important to understand that we never pray alone. All our prayers (each of us and all of us as part of the Church) are joined to Christ's own prayer of praise and love for God. His greatest prayer is the Eucharist, which means *giving thanks*. Christ's prayer is also our prayer.

- **Bible Reading:** *Matthew 6:5-13* (Jesus teaches us how to pray)

God and Evil

Since God looked at everything he created and *called it good*, how can there be evil in the world? Why do bad things happen like floods, fires and earthquakes? or suffering, sickness and death? Why do people do bad things to one another and to them selves? These are questions that people throughout history have asked. People who were great saints or teachers have thought about this problem. No one has given a complete answer. St. Augustine spent a lot of time praying and thinking about it and finally admitted, "*There was no solution.*" The book of *Job* tries to examine evil and offers a way to respond.

All we can do is admit that it is a mystery that has no easy answer. As we study more and more about the earth and the vast universe in which we are born, live and die, we realize that we and the world are not finished. The story of creation in *Genesis* tells us that God created the heavens and the earth, but we know that ice ages have come and gone, animals have roamed the earth and then disappeared, and human beings lived in caves and hunted, but today build large cities, fly airplanes and have walked on the moon. Things are constantly changing and growing, including human beings. A person is born, learns to walk and talk, goes to school, gets a job, raises a family and may even create a painting, write a poem or a song. Each life is like a seed that is planted, sprouts, grows up, and ends in a flower. Human life is like a miracle in slow motion, as it gradually unfolds over time. We also know that change and growth are not always neat, but often messy. Sometimes growing means trial and error. We make mistakes and must start over again. We do not understand something at first, but we learn to be wise and see things better as time goes on. This is something that is built into life as we know it. An important part of being human is that we have a mind and heart. We have a free will to say yes or no, to do good and bad things. This free will makes us human and makes love possible. No machine or robot without free will is able to love. In creating human beings with free will, God took a tremendous risk. He took the risk that human beings might turn against their Creator.

The book of *Genesis* (3:1-24) tells the story of how suffering and death came into the world. It describes how the first human beings, Adam and Eve, used their free will and choose to reject God. It is the story of how sin entered the world, and along with it all the suffering and death that are caused by sin. Sin is a very sad thing. God created the first human beings out of love, gave them minds to choose and hearts to love. But like our first parents, every human being has done the same thing – turned away from God by choosing something that makes them unhappy in the end.

God is all wise and powerful, although at times his wisdom seems like foolishness to human beings. His power is shown in ways that human beings do not expect. God is able to bring good out of evil, therefore evil does not have the last word. It is never the final answer, even when all hope seems to be lost. This truth gives each of us great hope, because we know that we often are at war with ourselves. Our problem is that we do not do what we know is right. We choose what we know is bad for ourselves and others. When we reach the bottom of our own sinfulness, we realize that only God can help us out of the pit we have made.

God did not abandon human beings. He created a plan to rescue them by sending his own Son into the world to lead them out of their misery. While the world grew weary of sin and longed for a Savior to deliver it from the mess it had created, the prophets of Israel foretold the coming of the *Messiah*. The story of our salvation through God's Son, the Messiah, is a story of how God took the greatest evil – the rejection and murder of his own Son - and turned it into our salvation.

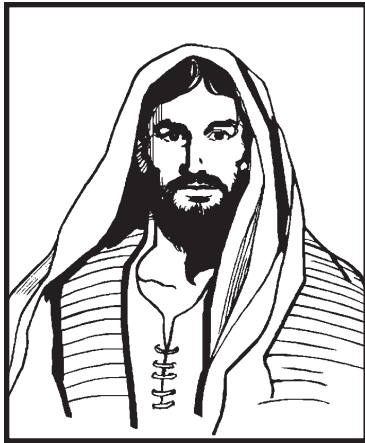
In *Acts 2:14-41* Peter, the leader of the apostles and the church, gives us a wonderful version of how God overcame the evil choices of our first parents, and then later, the killing of his own Son.



Think and Pray

Note: This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.

1. Since God is the Father of all creatures, this means everything is related. Does that change how we see and treat others, including animals and the earth itself?
2. It is easy to see someone as a child of God when they are kind and do not annoy us. Think of someone who annoys you and say to yourself: *he or she is a child of God*. Are you able to notice even one good thing about this person?
3. Because God created the universe out of nothing with his powerful love, we should approach God with great respect, but also love. Does this change the way you pray to God?
4. How should you behave as a son or daughter of God? Does it make you feel better than others so that you judge them? Or does it remind you that we are all sinners forgiven by our Father?
5. When something happens like a flood, a fire, or an accident, it often brings people together to help one another. This is this one way that good can come from evil. Can you think of other examples of this from your own life, when good came from something bad that happened?
6. God looked at everything he made and called it *good*. This means human being including you. When Jesus told us to love others as ourselves, he meant you must start within your own heart and be sure that you are not filled with self-hatred. Can you look with compassion on yourself even though you have made mistakes? Do you understand this connection—*if you hate yourself, your anger is acted out against others*? The key to a healthy life with God is to begin with your own heart and believe in God's love for you. Then you can reach out to others in true love.



2. And in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #422-455)

JESUS

The words *Jesus Christ* have been spoken for two thousand years by millions of people, both believers and non-believers.

What exactly do these words mean? *Jesus* comes from the Jewish name, *Joshua* or *Yeshua*, which means *God saves*. It is the name the angel Gabriel spoke of when he told Joseph that Mary was going to have a baby: “...you are to name him *Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins” (*Matthew 1:21*).

Therefore, *Jesus* is a name that fits well with the work he was sent to do on earth – to save human beings. He would free them from their sins and restore them to friendship and eternal life with God. Later on in the Matthew’s gospel we read that a young man came to Jesus and asked him what he must do to have eternal life - in other words, to be *saved*. The reply Jesus gave to him also is meant for anyone today who wishes to ask Jesus this same question.

Bible Reading: *Matthew 19: 16-19* (*A young man asks about eternal life*)

It is important to understand the simple instructions that Jesus gave this young man. All he had to do was *keep the commandments* and *love his neighbor as himself*. The path to life that Jesus gives us is a simple one that is easy to understand. Loving others leads to eternal life and salvation. We may make a lot of promises, speak words that sound nice, but if we do not take care of our fellow human beings, we do not really love God. The apostle John said the same thing in his first letter: “*If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.*” (*I John 3: 17-18*).

CHRIST

The word *Christ* means *anointed*. It is a Greek word for *Messiah*, which also means anointed in Hebrew. It may seem strange that Jesus received this Greek title, but during the time of the first Christians, Greek was the common language shared by most people throughout the Roman empire. That is why the Bible and the gospels were written in Greek – so that as many people as possible could read and understand them. In ancient times when someone was given a special job or position they often were anointed. Oil (*chrism*) was poured over their heads as a sign that they were given authority and power. Priests were anointed before they served at the altar. Kings were anointed before they ruled the people. Sometimes prophets were anointed because they were called to speak to the people on behalf of God. Jesus also was anointed at the beginning of his work on earth by the Spirit of God.

Bible Reading: Luke 4: 14-21 (*The ministry of Jesus*)

Not only was Jesus given a special power and work to do, he was unlike any human being who ever walked this earth. He was God's *son*. If anyone deserved to be called *Lord* as a king, it was Jesus. However, he was a different kind of leader. His kingdom did *not belong to this world*. When Pilate asked Jesus during his arrest if he was a king Jesus told him why he was born and came into the world. It was to be God's witness to the truth. His followers were those who listen to the truth. These words Jesus spoke before he was sentenced to death help us understand clearly how Jesus saw himself and his mission. He told Pilate that he was anointed for one very special purpose. His heavenly Father put him on earth to save people from their sins by bringing them to truth about themselves and God. In every age, each person is invited to stand before Jesus the *Christ* and humbly repeat Pilate's question: "*What is truth?*"

Bible Reading: John 18:28-38 (*A witness testifies to the truth*)

The kingdom that Jesus preached is God's kingdom of truth. If we want to enter this kingdom, Jesus tells us to start by being truthful with ourselves. Only after we have done that can we be truthful with the other people in our lives. As Jesus said, "*...the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). He meant that living by the truth is the only way we can have an honest, sincere life that gives us true peace of mind and heart. *Sincere* actually means *without wax* (from the Latin *sine cera*), referring to a letter that is open and not sealed with wax. In other words, there is nothing to hide. Yet we often find it hard to live by the truth. We pretend to be somebody we are not. We put on a front to cover our weakness. It may be hard for us to admit our mistakes. If we do not, we are living a lie and are a prisoner of our own lies. As Jesus said, "*...everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin*" (John 8:34).

If we try to live by our lies we do not fool others or ourselves in the long run. Sooner or later we must bring our lies into the light, admit the truth and begin to live sincerely. When our tired, old ways no longer bring us happiness or peace, and we see how they hurt ourselves and others, we must leave them behind. Our old lies are not good for us or those we love. Only then do we truly enter God's kingdom of truth and find lasting peace of heart. Going from lies to the truth, from *darkness* of sin to the *light* of God is a big change. It is often painful. It is like being born again. That is what Jesus meant as he spoke with Nicodemus who came to see him under cover of darkness.

Bible Reading: John 3: 1-21 (*Living in the light of truth*)

HIS ONLY SON

We read in the Bible: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life*" (John 3:16). Jesus was God's gift to the world, because our Creator loved us so much. God would do anything to lead us back from the chaos of sin to a life of peace and joy with him. As Paul in *Galatians* 4:4-5 wrote: "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son...so that we might receive adoption.*" Once the time had come and Jesus was ready to begin his ministry, he left his home in Nazareth and went to the Jordan river where his cousin, John, was preaching and baptizing. Jesus listened for awhile then stepped into the river and asked John to baptize him. It was a key moment in the

life of Jesus, God's *beloved Son*.

Bible Reading: *Matthew 3: 13-17* (*The beloved Son begins his work*)

After this Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray. He was about to begin his life among the people as their Messiah. He also knew that he was about to begin the battle between good and evil which would be the turning point for the whole human race. Satan, *the father of lies* as Jesus called him, understood that Jesus was about to challenge his power, so he met him in the desert to test him and try his best to keep Jesus from carrying out God's plan. In the end, Satan was no match for Jesus. As the followers of Jesus we also can expect to be tested. However, we can learn a lot from how Jesus faced evil.

Bible Reading: *Matthew 4: 1-11* (*Jesus is tested in the desert*)

As one of the apostles, John lived with Jesus and watched him closely day in and day out. He listened carefully to his words and kept them in his heart. He was the only apostle to stand near Jesus on Calvary with Mary his mother, and witness his death. John truly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the *Son of God*. He wanted to share this good news with people of every time and place. Many years after Jesus died and returned to heaven, the gospel according to John described the amazing experience of this apostle.

Bible Reading: *1 John 1: 1-10* (*We have seen and heard him*)

Because Jesus was truly God's Son, he was closer to God than any human being who has or will ever be on this earth. We can say he had the "inside story" of what God was like and he wanted to share God's goodness with humanity. In *Matthew 11:27* he said, "...no one knows the Father except the Son..." The apostle John caught a glimpse of God's glory at the Transfiguration when the appearance of Jesus changed and once again, just like his baptism, God said: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him*" (*Matthew 17:5*). When John wrote his gospel he taught that Jesus "pulled back the curtain" and showed us who God is and what he is really like: "*No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him*" (*John 1:18*). And if we truly hear Jesus we will come to understand what a wonderful God Jesus showed us. God is our Father who would do anything to win the hearts of his children and fill them with his boundless joy.

Bible Reading: *John 1: 1-18* (*The Father's Son comes among us*)

Jesus could have acted differently as the Son of God. In fact, many people turned away from him after awhile. He did not live up to their dreams of a powerful king. They were looking for a leader who would make them a rich and powerful nation again. Instead, they were disappointed with Jesus. He spoke about love and forgiveness, peace and unity with others. He even told people to pray for their enemies. Jesus was too much for them and so they walked away. After Jesus had died on the cross he looked even worse to them because he seemed like a total failure.

OUR LORD

At first, many of the followers of Jesus did not completely understand who he really was. Like the crowds who came to see and hear him they thought he was a prophet. Many people were

hoping that he might be the *Messiah* the people of Israel had been waiting for. They expected a person of great power to lead them, but they were not sure what he would be like. Some thought he would be a great king who would lead an army and help them get rid of their Roman rulers. Then they would be a free and powerful nation again. Gradually the words and actions of Jesus helped the apostles realize that he was different than what most people expected. Jesus showed them that he came to change people's hearts. He taught them that God was interested in saving their souls by calling them back to the truth and freeing them from their sins through his mercy and forgiveness. Jesus did reveal the power of God, but it was through the healings of body and soul of those who came to him for help. His healing power was so great that people were healed whether they were near or far (*Mark 5*). He also was able to bring people back to life after they were dead, like the daughter of Jairus (*Mark 5: 25-43*) or the widow's son (*Luke 7:11-17*). The most famous example of Jesus raising someone from the dead was Lazarus (*John 11: 1-44*). Gradually the followers of Jesus began to understand more clearly who he was. One day Jesus asked them who they thought he was.

Bible Reading: *Mark 8: 27-30* (*Peter answers the question*)

The followers of Jesus called him “*master*” and “*teacher*” but these were names of respect for any great teacher. They also called him “*Lord*” which was often just a title of respect for a great person. Later on they would use this title in the same way that the Jews used it for God. The Jews respected God's name, *Yahweh*, so much that they would never speak it. Only the high priest would say God's name once a year in the temple. When they wrote the scriptures they did not use God's name but used *LORD* instead. This is how Thomas used it after Jesus rose from the dead and let this doubting apostle touch his wounds. Thomas believed and said: “*My Lord and my God!*” (*John 20:28*).

Bible Reading: *Exodus 3: 1-15 and Psalm 113* (*The awesome name of God*)

Calling Jesus *Lord* had a deep meaning for his followers. As they witnessed the great power of Jesus in his miracles, they became convinced that he came to earth from heaven. One day the apostles were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was with them but he was sleeping. When a terrible storm started make huge waves they thought they were going to drown, so they turned to him for help. What happened filled them with awe.

Bible Reading: *Mark 4: 35-41* (*Jesus calms the storm*)

After Jesus died and rose from the dead, “*Lord*” became a title which meant that Jesus was equal to God. Paul used it in this way when he wrote in *Ephesians 4:5* about “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*” and in *Romans 10:9*: “*Jesus is Lord.*” However, Jesus did not fit the common human idea of a powerful lord. Paul rejected Jesus at first. He arrested and put in chains those who followed Jesus in order to bring them to trial. In due time Paul saw the light and give himself to Jesus and his way of life. His letters in the New Testament gave early Christians a true understanding of Christ and his power.

Bible Reading: *Philippians 2: 5-11* (*A different kind of power*)



Think and Pray

Note: *This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.*

1. It is one thing to say “*I believe in Jesus*” but what does it mean to really follow him every day, in every part of your life? How does Jesus make a difference in your life? Jesus means *God saves*. How does He save your life?
2. Have you really allowed Jesus into your life? Have you set aside time to be with him and speak with him everyday? Is your life ruled by the gospel of Jesus?
3. As a follower of Jesus you were anointed during your baptism. This means you are called to be a copy of Jesus for others to see. You do not have to look very far to begin reaching out to others as a Christian. How do you treat the people around you—inmates, guards, visitors and your family?
4. Are you like the first followers of Jesus who did not understand who Jesus was right away? Has it taken you a long time to get to know who Jesus really is?
5. If Jesus who is *Lord and God* humbled himself by washing his disciples’ feet, how should you behave toward your fellow Christians? What do you think about the teaching of Jesus in *Matthew 23:11*: “*The greatest among you must be your servant*”?



3. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #456-570)

“The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). This is how the angel explains to Mary how she will have a child. Two thousand years later we may not realize the scandal this caused in Mary’s home

town, or the great problem it made for Joseph who about divorcing her instead of becoming her husband. It was a test of faith and courage for them both.

Bible Reading: Matthew 1: 18-25 (A virgin will give birth to a Child)

Mary was chosen because she was *full of grace*. This meant that she was without sin. Mary was ready to do whatever God wanted. Her life was not filled with herself or other things so that there was no room for God. God was the center of her life. We are often so focused on ourselves and other things that God takes second place. Like Joseph and Mary who found no room in the inn, there is no room in our hearts. We are wrapped up in ourselves with no time for God. As a wise person once said *if we give God time, he will give us eternity*. We try to live without God but then we hit bottom. Then we are lost, our lives feel empty, and we have no where else to turn. Finally, we stand before God broken and humble. That is when God’s Spirit is able to speak to us and heal us, because we are empty of everything else. We finally are willing to hear God. Among all the human beings that God could have chosen, God chose a young woman named Mary because she was humble and willing.

Bible Reading: Luke 1: 26-38 (Nothing is impossible for God)

The Church teaches through its creed that Jesus was born of a *virgin*. Like Mary we also ask the question: “*How can this be?*” We find the source of this belief in Mary’s own words: “*since I have no relations with a man*” (Luke 1:34) as well as the prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) that Matthew uses: “*the virgin shall be with child and bear a son...*” (Matthew 1:23). A study of the word used by those who translated *Isaiah* from Hebrew to Greek shows that Mary was a virgin. The Greek word *parthenos* is used, and it can only mean *virgin*. Beyond that, the Church has taught, as St. Augustine did (and as many other early Christian teachers), that Mary was *always a virgin*.

However, when the gospels mention the *brothers of Jesus* (Mark 3:31-35) doesn’t this mean that Mary was not a virgin as Catholics believe? After all, Mary was promised to Joseph (Luke 1:27) and eventually they became husband and wife (Matthew 1:24). Eusebius of Caesarea, a bishop who lived from 263-340 A.D., wrote the first history of the Church. He suggested that Joseph had children by an earlier marriage, and after his first wife died, took Mary as his wife. This could explain *the brothers of Jesus*, and why the apostle James was called the brother of the Lord (Galatians 1:19). Again there is a simple answer to all this. It was a custom in biblical

times to call anyone related by blood a brother, especially a close cousin. This is still done in certain cultures today. St. Jerome (321-420 A.D.) defends Mary's virginity from the Bible itself. This famous translator of the entire Bible knew Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin well. His Latin version of the Bible served Christians for more than a thousand years. Some people say that according to the Bible Joseph and Mary had sexual relations after Jesus was born because of the word until in *Matthew 1:25*: "*He had no relations with her until she bore a son...*" Jerome explained how the Hebrew word *until* still meant Mary was a virgin after Jesus was born. He gave the example of *1 Corinthians 15:25* which says: "*For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*" Paul meant that Jesus continued to reign after his enemies were conquered. We mean the same thing when we say: "I will love you *until* the stars no longer shine." We do not mean that after the stars disappear we no longer love this person. Jerome also explained that *first-born* did not mean that other children followed Jesus. He turned to *Numbers 18:15* for an explanation: "*Every living thing that opens the womb...shall be yours;...*" This official title means a person is called first-born because they open the womb, not because they must be followed by other brothers and sisters. From all of this we see how Mary's virginity is explained and defended by properly understanding the Bible itself.

After Mary learned she was to be the mother of God's Son, she answered the angel with the words, "*May it be done to me...*" (*Luke 1:38*). In God's plan our salvation waited for Mary's answer. Even God waited for her reply! Mary is everyone's mother because she said "yes" for all of us. When the first person set foot on the moon he spoke for all of us: "*one small step for man, one giant step for mankind.*" Yet Mary did far more than land on the moon. She took the first step for our salvation - and she did it for all of us. This is why we honor her as our mother, because Jesus came into our world through her. She is a most special human being.

Bible Reading: *Luke 1: 39-45* (*The mother of Jesus believes*)

The Bible tells us in many other passages how unselfish Mary was. After the angel's visit, Mary did not stay at home to take care of herself. Instead, she went to help her pregnant cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth could have turned Mary away as someone who was talking about "crazy" ideas. Instead, she praised her for her great faith, "*Most blessed are you who among women...Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled*" (*Luke 1:42,45*). Although Mary was young, she already was wise and strong. Because she believed completely in God's power and will she was totally prepared for the gospel that her Son would preach.

Bible Reading: *Luke 1: 46-55* (*Mary gives praise to God*)

One of the most beautiful prayers of the Bible is also a song created by the mother of Jesus. It is called the *Magnificat* from the Latin word for *praise* or *give glory*. In this song Mary praises God for what he has done not only for her but for all people. In her humility she does not stand in the way of God's glory, but she is happy to do all that she can to bring about his will on earth. She sings of his mercy, and how he does not like pride, arrogance, or the abuse of power. In fact, God pays attention to the lowly and the needy. He is faithful to his promise to show mercy to those who turn to him. In this way, she was like Jesus who became a friend to outcasts and sinners.

In Mary's song we see that she understands how God used her to bless others. None of us likes to be used by others for their selfish reasons. But being used by God is an honor not an insult. Mary does not brag but simply states the truth. This is not pride because, as the saying goes, *humility is truth*. She is only interested in giving glory to God and his plan. Catholics have no problem giving Mary a special place of honor. This is something that she herself foretold in *Luke 1:48*:

*“For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.”*

Her lowliness is the key to Mary's greatness and our devotion to her as the mother of Jesus, She was totally humble and willing to do what God wanted.

Bible Reading: *Luke 2: 1-20* (*God is born among the lowly*)

The way Jesus was born reveals who God is and the way He does things. His power is not like worldly power. Jesus was born in a quiet, out-of-the-way place, unknown to the rulers of the empire. God does not need worldly power to do his will. Jesus was born in a shelter for animals. His mother used the rough box where animals eat their food for his crib. The first human beings to see Jesus were simple shepherds who could not read or write. Then and now God chooses the little, the hidden and the humble of the world to carry out his plan. That is why Jesus told his followers that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven are those who have become like little children (*Matthew 18:2-4*). Children are honest. They do not have big egos but are poor in spirit. They trust totally are open to God. In *2 Corinthians 8:9* St. Paul tells us that the poverty of Jesus makes us rich: “...for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” We are rich in the mercy we have received from God, and in the knowledge of how valuable we are in God's eyes. Despite our faults he gave us his only Son as our savior. That is why the Church sings during the Easter Vigil, “*O happy fault which merited such a Redeemer!*”

Bible Reading: *John 1: 1-4* (*The son of Mary is God's Son*)

Mary is also called the Mother of God. How can this be? After all, God created her. If we think about it, the answer is simple. Mary is the mother of Jesus, who is *God*. She is part of a great mystery, the plan which God had for the salvation of the world since the beginning. His plan was to send us his only Son to save us from our sins by becoming one of us. Mary's virginity and motherhood points to the truth that God came among us to give us new life.

Bible Reading: *John 1: 14-18* (*The Word of God became flesh*)

Because Jesus was the son of a human mother, it meant that he was human too. During the years of his “hidden life” Jesus grew up as an ordinary human being with Mary, Joseph and all his relatives and neighbors in Nazareth. He had a body and feelings like ours. At times he felt hungry, thirsty and tired. When he went to the desert to fast and pray before beginning his public ministry, he even was tested by Satan like we are. The Bible tells us he was like us in all things except sin: “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin*” (*Hebrews 4:15*). Jesus

truly is our brother, a human being like us. His message to us is not to be afraid of God, but to draw near to God and ask for mercy and help whenever we need it.

Because Mary was so faithful to God's plan of salvation, we find her at every important event in the Gospel. Although she is usually in the background in the New Testament, these events tell us a lot about her role as mother of Christ and of the Church. Here are three important events when Mary was present:

Bible Reading: *John 2: 1-11* (*Mary goes for help*)

At the wedding feast of *Cana* described in *John 2:1-11*, Mary took the needs of the wedding couple to Jesus because they were running out of wine. In response to Mary Jesus did his first miracle, changing water into wine. The result was that *his disciples began to believe in him*.

Bible Reading: *John 19: 25-27* (*Mary stands beside her Son*)

We also find Mary on *Calvary*, standing beside the cross with the disciple John. Jesus looked at her and said, “ ‘...*behold, your son.*’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘*Behold, your mother*’ ” (*John 19:26-27*). At that moment Jesus gave Mary to all of us as our spiritual mother.

Bible Reading: *Acts 1: 13-14* (*Mary in our midst*)

Again we read that Mary was present at *Pentecost*, the beginning of the church. She was with the disciples who devoted themselves with one accord to prayer as they waited for the holy Spirit to come upon them. From there they went out as witnesses to the ends of the earth. Then and now Mary is in the midst of the church praying with the disciples of her Son, ready for whatever God wants to do. She is with us today, praying with us and for us. That is why she is included whenever the Catholic community gathers to pray, especially in the prayers of the Mass. During the Mass, we pray “in the company of the virgin Mary and the apostles” (*Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I*). We turn to her in prayer because she reminds us to be servants of Jesus. She says to us as she did long ago at the wedding in *Cana*, “ ‘*Do whatever he tells you*’ ” (*John 2:5*).

In the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch we find a great witness of the true faith of the apostles. He lived during the last days of the apostles, and died in 107 A.D. He described very clearly in one of his letters what the Christians of his day believed. It sounds very much like the Apostles' Creed:

“*Our Lord is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin..he was truly nailed to a tree for us in his flesh under Pontius Pilate...he truly suffered, as he is also truly risen*” (*Letter to the Smyrnans 1-2*).



Think and Pray

Note: This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.

1. What can you do to “prepare the way” in your own life, so that God can enter your heart and soul?
2. Besides Mary and Joseph, the humble shepherds were the first to hear the good news of Christ’s birth. If God chose them do you think He might choose you for his work too?
3. How does Mary serve as your example as a follower of Christ?
4. How do we become like a child again in God’s kingdom?



4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #571-630)

First of all, why is it so important to say that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate? It is important because we are saying that it *really happened*. It can be traced to a certain time and place.

It even was recorded by people who were not followers of Christ. In other words, God entered our human world and changed our lives forever. All of human history was changed forever.

After the Catholic community celebrates *Christmas* (the birth of Jesus), and the *Epiphany* (the visit of the magi), it also celebrates the feast of the *Baptism* of the Lord. The baptism is such an important event in the life of Jesus that it is recorded in all four gospels. The following is one of the Bible readings that the Catholic Church uses on the feast of the Baptism of Jesus.

Bible Reading: Isaiah 42:6-7 *(The prophet announces the coming savior)*

Notice that the prophet talks about *light*. Light is important at Christmas when we hear that when Jesus is born *a light has shown upon us*. Light is also important during the Epiphany when Jesus is honored by the magi who have come from other lands to honor Jesus. This means that he is the *light of all people*, not just the Jewish people among whom he was born.

Each of these events in the life of Jesus is also called an *epiphany* since each one, in its own way, showed who Jesus was: the announcement to the shepherds, the visit of the wise men, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river. Like a flower slowly unfolding, these events gradually revealed who Jesus was. They lead us to understand the person and power of Jesus. As we will see, these three events also shed light on our understanding of the death of Jesus.

After thirty years of private life, Jesus appeared in public. He was ready to begin his ministry. His light was about to shine for all to see in his powerful words and works. However, before he began preaching and healing, Jesus went to the Jordan river where John the Baptist was calling people to repent. As a sign of this new change in their lives he was baptizing them also.

Bible Reading: Luke 3:1-18 *(John prepares for the coming of Jesus)*

The idea that the Jesus was baptized may seem strange to us. His baptism had nothing to do with forgiveness because Jesus was sinless. Instead, it had to do with giving himself to God and God revealing who Jesus was his beloved son. It was a testimony from God himself.

Bible Reading: Mark 1: 9-11 *(Jesus is God's beloved)*

Furthermore, what God the Father said about Jesus his *beloved* also shed light on each of us.

We also have been baptized, and as followers of Jesus who are trying to be like him, *we also are God's beloved*. As we become more and more like Jesus, we begin to understand how important we are to God, how favored we are by Him. God's love heals our hearts and souls as we realize that God loved us and sent his only Son to suffer and die for us. There should be no doubt that we are valuable in God's eyes.

After Jesus was baptized he went into the desert where he was tempted by Satan. This was where the struggle between good and evil could be seen very clearly. For once Satan came out in the open, spoke for himself and did not use others to do his dirty work. Satan understood how important Jesus was to humanity. It also showed that Jesus was like us in all things except sin. Before his death, Jesus would be tested one last time in the garden of Gethsemane, where the gospels do not hesitate to show his human side. *This struggle continues within each of us to this day as we reject Satan way and give ourselves to God's way.*

Because we have been baptized as his followers we also are part of the struggle between good and evil. *During our baptism we promised to reject Satan and sin*. St. Paul wrote about this struggle in his letters to the early Christians. He encouraged them be strong. As one inmate put it, we are called to "stand up in the storm." Here are some Bible readings about the spiritual struggle for good that Christians are part of.

Bible Reading: Romans 13:12, Ephesians 6:11-13, and I Peter 4:1-2. *(The good fight)*

After Satan was defeated in the desert, Jesus began his public ministry. It did not take long for the struggle to take another form. Satan began using others to get at Jesus instead of doing it himself. Just because Jesus was doing so much good the religious leaders became suspicious. They noticed two things which made them upset: 1) he *taught with authority* and 2) he claimed to *forgive sins*.

Bible Reading: Mark 2:1-12 *"Who but God alone can forgive sins?" (v.7)*

This passage shows early on how Jesus was in conflict with his enemies. By forgiving sins he either falsely made himself equal to God or was telling the truth about who he was.

Bible Reading: Mark 3:1-6 This passage gives another example of the struggle between Jesus and his enemies. Jesus teaches how valuable people are to God. It also shows how his enemies lacked this spirit because they didn't care about the man, only their rules and their power to enforce them.

Bible Reading: Mark 11:27-33 - A storm was gathering that would end in the death of Jesus. *Mark 14: 1-2 and 10-11* tells how a plot was made to catch Jesus with the help of one of his own apostles, Judas.

Toward the end of his life, while he was on the temple grounds, Jesus could no longer hold back his anger and frustration. He boldly told his enemies: *"You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter"* (Matthew 23:13). In fact, all of Chapter 23 describes how Jesus challenges them. Over and over again, Jesus called them *blind guides* and *hypocrites*. Although these religious leaders of Jesus' day were the enemies who had him killed, what was the *real reason* that Jesus died?

Through our eyes of faith we now understand that God's love for the sinner and the way Jesus forgave sins was at the heart of the struggle between Jesus and his enemies. Although it put his life in danger, Jesus would not change his message or ways—*forgiveness of sin* was the reason he came into the world and he was ready to give his life for it. In *John 14:13* Jesus explains his death in his own words: "...the world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me." At the Last Supper he broke the bread and shared the cup of his blood which was going to be shed "*for the forgiveness of sins*" (*Matthew 26:28*). During his crucifixion Jesus kept on teaching forgiveness when he prayed for his enemies: "*Father, forgive them...*" (*Luke 23:34*). When the criminal executed with him asked to be forgiven Jesus told him: "...today you will be with me in Paradise" (*Luke 23:43*). The Bible and the Church teach that although the enemies of Jesus crucified him God's love and our sins were the real reason he died: "*For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins...*" (*1 Corinthians 15:3*). St. Augustine taught that although Christ died for us all, he did it as if each one of us was the only person he died for. Peter, who ran away during the passion of Jesus, later wrote: "*He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross...By his wounds you have been healed*" (*1 Peter 2:24*). Peter knew this from his own experience as a sinner who turned away from Jesus.

Bible Reading: Acts 10: 34-43 (*Peter gives witness to Christ*)

God revealed so much about himself when his only Son died. At the same moment that Jesus died "*The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom*" (*Mark 15:38*). This meant that the holy of holies, God's dwelling place—hidden from everyone except the high priest—was now exposed for everyone to see. This was a sign that in Jesus on the cross God revealed his own heart and the greatness of his love for us. It also reveals clearly the person and power of Jesus. He was the beloved Son, given to us by God himself, to show once and for all who God really was.

The Crucifixion: The way Jesus was executed was a very painful and slow death. The victim was hung on a cross either by nails or with his arms tied. The weight of the body gradually pulled the person down so that their lungs could not take in air and the person gradually suffocated. In some cases it took several days to die. If the executioners did not want it to take that long, they broke the victim's legs so that he suffocated sooner. The soldiers on Calvary broke the legs of the two criminals crucified with Jesus, but since Jesus was already dead so they did not break his legs. One of soldiers stabbed his side (and his heart) with a spear to make sure the was really dead. Pilate was surprised when the soldiers reported that Jesus died in just six hours. Those who witnessed how Jesus died witnessed something very amazing. It was very unusual for the victim to cry out in a loud voice as Jesus did, because it was hard to breathe. However, that is what Jesus did just before he died and it impressed the soldiers who were standing guard. That is why the person who wrote the gospel recorded it (*Mark 15:37-39*).

Sacred Blood: For the ancient Jews blood meant life. That is why they poured blood on the altar of the temple as a sacrifice. But why did God ask that the blood of Jesus be shed? Wasn't this going to far? Couldn't Jesus have just walked among us and been our teacher? Wouldn't his sacred words have been enough? An honest look at the condition of humanity and its history of bloodshed helps us understand why only the blood of Jesus could be the answer. The blood of Jesus shed served God's plan to heal the world and bring about peace.

Everlasting Covenant: The treaty made between God and humanity on Calvary would last for all eternity. That is why Moses sprinkled blood to seal the covenant at Sinai. It was a treaty that was far more important than one that ends the fighting between two armies. The bloodshed of Jesus meant that God would never go back on his terms of peace with us. The precious blood of his beloved Son sealed this treaty forever. Jesus connected God's treaty with his death when he shared the cup at the last supper with his apostles. He told them it was his blood of the covenant that was poured out for the forgiveness of sin.

God's Plan: It is important to keep in mind that although the religious leaders and Pilate killed Jesus, God used the death of his Son to bring about his plan to save us. Peter explained it this way in a speech he gave after Jesus rose from the dead: "*This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God...*" (Acts 2:23). Other passages in the Bible also describe God's plan: *I Corinthians* 15:3 and *Acts* 3:18. Long before Jesus was born the prophet Isaiah predicted that the Messiah was going to be the "Suffering Servant" (*Isaiah* 52:13–53:12). God unfolded his plan by bringing good out of the evil human beings did to his Son. Other parts of the Bible deal with this same idea: *Acts* 8:32-35 and *Matthew* 20:28. What looked like failure and the end of the road on Calvary was really the way God revealed his great love for us, as we read in *I John* 4:10, and in *Romans* 5:8.

Spiritual Battle: When Jesus was dying "...darkness came over the whole land..." (*Matthew* 27:45). During the crucifixion we get a glimpse into the soul of Jesus when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (*Matthew* 27:46). Jesus was praying from *Psalms* 22. God did not really abandon Jesus, but it surely must have felt like it. Many prophets and saints also felt that sometimes God was absent, like they were going through a spiritual desert. They prayed but they felt dry inside instead of joyful. St. John of the Cross called this the *dark night of the soul*. For some, this dark night lasted for a few months, for others like St. Teresa of Avila, it lasted longer. It is important to remember that it is only a feeling because God never leaves us, even for a second. As St. Augustine said, "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves." When we cannot feel God near to us all we can do is hang on in faith. It is like saying: "I believe the sun is shining even when I can't see it." *Genesis*, Chapter 15, describes how Abraham also went through this dark night. God told him to prepare a sacrifice of his best animals. So Abraham cut the meat, placed it on the ground, and then waited for God to come. All day long Abraham fought to keep the vultures away, until the sun went down and it was dark. Finally, God sent a fire to burn up his sacrifice and Abraham felt at peace with God.

If the holy patriarchs, prophets, saints, and Jesus himself felt this dark night, we should not be surprised when it happens to us. We are called to share in the same struggle. We are part of this *fight for the light*. Just as he did with Jesus, Satan will try to find our weakness and use it for his own purposes. We must look at ourselves in the light of God's mercy and ask for his guidance and strength as we go about our day. At any turn we may be faced with a test of our faith. When we feel weak or discouraged, when we are being tested, and everything is going against our efforts to be good, we can take strength and comfort in Jesus. He understands and encourages us to remain faithful in all kinds of trials. As he told his followers: "By your perseverance you will secure your lives" (*Luke* 21: 19). The only difference between the saints and ourselves is that after they fell, they did not stay down. They believed in God's mercy, got up right away, and tried again. This is what it means to "take up our cross" every day and follow Jesus. We are not a Church of perfect people but forgiven sinners.

Rejecting Evil

During a certain point in Baptism the celebrant (the priest or deacon) asks the godparents to reject evil and renew their faith.

First the celebrant says that by water and the Holy spirit they have gathered to receive the gift of new life from God, who is love. They must take care to bring up the one about to be baptized in the practice of the faith. They must see that this God-given life is kept safe from the poison of sin, and always grows stronger. Then the godparents renew the vows of their own baptism, reject sin, and profess their faith in Christ. They are asked the following questions.

Celebrant: *Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children?*

Godparents: I do.

Celebrant: *Do you reject the glamor of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?*

Godparents: I do.

Celebrant: *Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?*

Godparents: I do.

These questions are followed by the *Apostles Creed* and the final words of the celebrant:

This is our faith, this is the faith of the church.

We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Whenever we are faced with evil like Jesus and so many of his loyal followers were, we can return to these same questions and pray the *Apostles Creed*. This will help keep us spiritually strong in our struggle against evil, no matter how we are tempted.

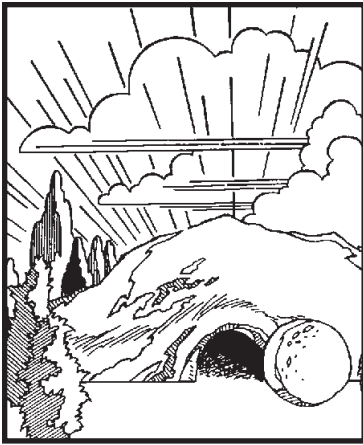




Think and Pray

Note: *This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.*

1. If Jesus saved us on the cross why do we have to do anything more?
2. How does the death of Jesus show us God's love?
3. Have you ever felt like you were in a spiritual desert, and that your faith was being tested? What did you do about it? How can you deal with your weaknesses?
4. Do you realize that because you are baptized that you also are God's *beloved* son? Does this change how you see yourself?
5. As a follower of Christ you are invited to "*take up the cross daily.*" Does this mean that you cannot help others carry their cross? Does your own cross get heavier or lighter when you do this?
6. When and where in your own life have you been called to stand up for or give witness to the gospel?



5. He descended to the dead. The third day He rose again from the dead.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #631-747)

The teaching of the early Church about the death of Jesus is very clear. Those who wrote the gospels also left no doubt that it really happened. First of all, after the soldiers pierced the side (and heart) of Jesus with a lance to make sure He was dead, and then reported this to Pilate. Secondly, the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb a heavy stone was rolled over the entrance to seal it.

Bible Reading: Mark 15: 42-47 *(Jesus really died and was buried)*

The Bible teaches that while his body was in the tomb, Jesus was among the dead: “...*he also descended into the lower [regions]...*” (*Ephesians 4: 9*). Most Jews, and many pagans of the ancient world, believed there was a special place for the souls of the dead located somewhere under the earth. The Jews called this place *sheol*, while the Greeks called it *hades*. Early church leaders taught that while Jesus was among the dead, he also preached the gospel to them: “...*the gospel was preached even to the dead...*” (*I Peter 4:6*). All those who had died since the beginning of the world heard words of mercy spoken by the Son of God. In God’s mysterious plan, the souls of the good were given the hope of eternal life. During his crucifixion Jesus had prayed *Psalm 22:1*, “*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*” Now he fulfilled the rest of it,

*“All who sleep in the earth
will bow low before God;
All who have gone down into the dust
will kneel in homage” (Psalm 22:30).*

The person to be baptized in the early church copied his dying (and rising), by going down into the water (and coming up from it again). In many ancient churches, special pools of water used for baptism made this even more real. Steps went into the water on one side and out of the water on the other side. Some baptismal pools were even made in the shape of a cross. Where the baptism pools were not available rivers and lakes were used, or water was poured over the head of the new believer. Many modern churches have baptismal pools instead of fonts. They have returned to the ancient custom of baptizing the whole body. Either way, the person is truly baptized. St. Paul wrote about baptism in his letter to the Christians living in Rome.

Bible Reading: Romans 6: 5-11 *(We die with Christ)*

As soon as Jesus died, his body was taken from the cross and buried before sunset when the Sabbath began and no work could be done. So there was no time to prepare his body for a proper burial. It is interesting that the tomb of Jesus was closed so quickly on the same day that he died. Usually, it was the custom of the ancient Jews to wait three days before a tomb was sealed. This was to make sure that the person was not still alive. After three days, the body would

begin to show signs of decay, and only then was the tomb closed. This custom can be seen in the story of Lazarus, the friend whom Jesus raised from the dead. When Jesus arrived on the scene, the body of Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days, so the tomb was already closed.

Bible Reading: *John 11: 1-44* (*A dead man is raised to life*)

What Jesus did for Lazarus was a sign of his own resurrection and that of all Christians. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, just as he foretold, leaving behind nothing but an empty tomb and the burial cloths. The first person to discover the empty tomb on the first Easter morning was Mary Magdalene. She came to the tomb with a companion to give Jesus a proper burial. However, what she and the other two women found was the stone rolled back from the empty tomb. Because Mary was the first to see Jesus and tell the apostles about it, she is often called “the apostle to the apostles.”

Bible Reading: *John 20: 1-18* (*The empty tomb and the risen Lord*)

It is interesting to realize that at the very moment Jesus was raised from the dead he was alone in the tomb. No human being actually saw it happen. Once again, God does not do things the way human beings do them. There were no reporters, no cameras, no world-wide television. However, for those who saw the empty tomb after it happened, there may have been something unusual about the burial shroud and cloth that covered the body and head of Jesus. Perhaps the cloths still kept the shape of his body after he was no longer there. We do not know, but when Peter and John looked in they understood that Jesus had disappeared. After that, Jesus appeared several times to his disciples. It should great a great comfort and hope for us to know that some of them did not believe it at first. Jesus had to ask for food to eat to prove that he was not a ghost. The story of Thomas who refused to believe the other apostles, shows how patient Jesus was as Thomas gradually changed from doubt to faith. Jesus is just as patient with us today as we grow from doubters to believing Christians. Sometimes faith is like a seed that takes time to grow.

Bible Reading: *John 20: 24-29* (*The doubting disciple believes*)

Paul was very clear about the link between our faith and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He said: “*And if Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, your faith*” (*I Corinthians 15:14*). He insisted that Jesus really rose from the dead, and left us a list of the appearances of Jesus. He listed himself among those who saw Jesus alive after his death and resurrection.

Bible Reading: *1 Corinthians 15: 1-11* (*Paul testifies to the resurrection of Christ*)

When Jesus restored the daughter of Jairus, the widow’s son and his friend Lazarus to life, they returned to their normal bodies and ordinary lives. With Jesus it was different. Although he proved that he was not a ghost by eating food and allowing others to touch his wounds, his risen body was different than his earthly body. He appeared in a room even though the doors were locked. Then he disappeared just as suddenly. He lived beyond time and space in eternal life that is promised to all who believe in him. Paul explains how the dead will rise to new life by referring to the way a seed dies in the earth and grows into something completely new.

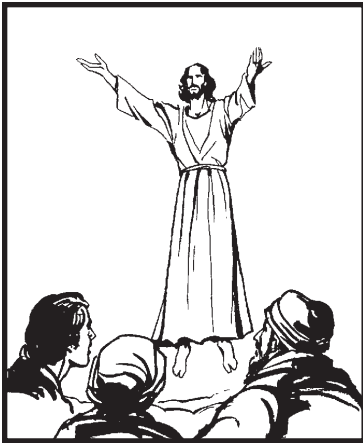
Bible Reading: *1 Corinthians 15: 36-44* (*A seed springs to new life*)



Think and Pray

Note: *This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.*

1. Why was it so important for the Creed to say that Jesus *really* died?
2. *If Christ had not risen, not a single flower would sprout from the earth and bloom.* What do you think this means? (See *John* 1: 1-3 for a clue).
3. Why is the Eucharist called the promise of eternal glory? (See *Matthew* 26: 29 for a clue).
4. Even the disciples who knew Jesus were slow to believe in his resurrection. How does the story of Thomas the doubting apostle make you feel?
5. What does *2 Peter* 3: 4 say to doubters who ask, “*Where is the promise of his coming?*”



6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #659-667)

We believe that after Christ returned to heaven, he took his place at the *right hand* of God. The words *right hand* have a special meaning. We can turn to the Bible to find out why these two words are so important. There are many places in both the Old and New Testaments where they are used by the prophets, apostles and Jesus. Here are examples of some of them:

In the Old Testament:

Exodus 15: 6 - *“Your right hand, O Lord, magnificent in power,
your right hand, O Lord, has shattered the enemy.”*

Psalm 18:35 - *“...your right hand has upheld me;
you stooped to make me great.”*

Psalm 98:1 - *“Sing a new song to the Lord...
whose right hand and holy arm
have won the victory.”*

Psalm 118:16-17 - *“...the Lord’s right hand is raised;
the Lord’s right hand strikes with power.
I shall not die but live...”*

Isaiah 41:10 - *“Fear not, I am with you;
be not dismayed; I am your God.
I will strengthen you, and help you,
and uphold you with my right hand of justice.”*

Isaiah 48:13 - *“Yes, my hand laid the foundations of the earth;
my right hand spread out the heavens.”*

In the New Testament:

Matthew 22: 44 - Jesus repeats the words of *Psalm 110:1*:
*“The LORD says to you my lord:
‘Take your throne at my right hand’
while I make your enemies your footstool’ ”*

Acts 2:34 - Peter the apostle used this about Jesus in his speech at Pentecost:

“For David did not go up into heaven, but he himself said:

*‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’ ’*

Acts 7:55 - As he was being stoned to death, the first martyr Stephen saw a vision of Christ:

“But he, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God...”

Romans 8:34 - *“It is Christ [Jesus] who died, rather, was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.”*

Ephesians 1:18-23 - In this beautiful passage the apostle Paul describes how Christ reigns over his own body which is his family of believers: *“May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance...and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every...name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.”*

Hebrews 1:1-4 - Through his son Jesus God spoke to us with words of mercy and love that we could understand, and cleansed us of our sins:

“In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe,

*who is...the very imprint of his being,
and who sustains all things by his mighty word.
When he had accomplished purification from sins,
he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
as far superior to the angels,
as the name he has inherited as more excellent than theirs.”*

Mark 16:19 - After Jesus had finished his work on earth he returned to heaven:

“So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God.”

All of these Bible passages help us get a better understanding of what the right hand meant in biblical times. The same hand that created us saves us. God is described as using his right hand to create the world, to create life. He also uses it to protect his people from danger. If we can understand what it was like to be a king or ruler in the ancient world we will get a similar idea of what the *right hand* means. There is a famous statue of Caesar Augustus who ruled the Roman

empire when Jesus was born. He stands with his strong, powerful right arm and hand raised in the air. With this hand he commanded armies that conquered the world. His hand could protect the weak and the conquered. Or, with the wave of his hand he could order people to be executed. People lived or died by his hand. To the ancient mind, if the hand of a human emperor was so powerful, what must the hand of God be like? When Jesus entered heaven after his death and resurrection, he took his place at the right hand of God. He ruled with the power of God over life and death because he was the Son of God. Unlike Caesar who ruled by fear, Jesus rules by love and mercy. We do not have to be afraid of getting close to Christ as the Bible tells us in *Hebrews 4: 15-16*:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace...”

While he was on earth Jesus commanded his followers to *“love one another”* and act like servants toward one other. Even in heaven, in all his power, he continues to be an example of the gospel because he serves us in all our needs. He sends us his grace to guide and strengthen us in times of trial and temptation. He stands ready to forgive us when we call on him for forgiveness. He offers his loving embrace whenever we turn to him. He is an everlasting friend, a loyal helper, calling us to a new life of joy and peace within his family of believers.

Bible Reading: *Philippians 2: 5-11* (*The humility of Christ*)

Jesus taught his followers not only by what he said, but also by what he did. At the last supper he washed the feet of his apostles and told them: do as I have done. The true follower of Christ is one who is ready and willing to help others. The follower of Jesus lives by the same love that Jesus has. He values those whom God has created and for whom he has shed his blood. Jesus calls us his *friends* because that is what we are! Our friendship does not give us a right to be filled with self-glory, however. When the mother of two disciples asked Jesus to place them on his right and left in the kingdom, Jesus replied: “ ‘...to sit at my right and at my left [, this] is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father’ ” (*Matthew 20:23*). Even Jesus humbly relied on God to seat him in glory, that is why his ascending to heaven is also an example of his great humility.

Bible Reading: *John 13: 1-17* (*Jesus gives us an example*)

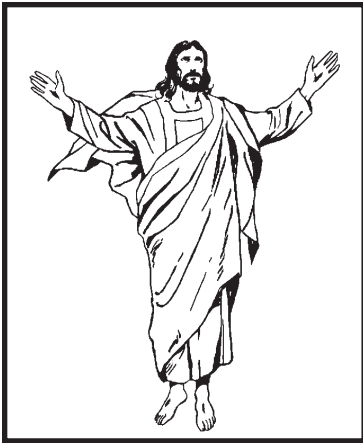
When Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene in the garden after he rose from the tomb, he told her to “...go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’ ” (*John 20:17*). When Jesus entered heaven he was the first of many brothers and sisters to do. Because he is the head of his body, his people, Jesus frees the rest of us from sin and darkness when he opens the way to new life. It is like a miner who has been trapped in darkness after a cave in, but finally finds an opening to the light. When just his head sees the light for the first time, his whole body is filled with hope because rescue is near at hand. Or, in another example, when baby is born its head comes first. When the head begins to breath, its whole body shares in the air.



Think and Pray

Note: *This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.*

1. In everyday life, when a leader calls someone “*my right hand*” what does this mean?
2. How does Jesus continue to give us an example of *service* even in heaven?
How does he use his divine power?
3. After Jesus ascended to heaven, his followers went forth to spread the good news.
How can we be Christ’s right hand in this everyday world?
4. Because of your baptism you are *called* to be witnesses for the gospel. How can you *go forth* while you are still confined in prison?



7. From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #668-682)

After the resurrection and several appearances, the time came for Jesus to leave his disciples and return to his Father. We read in *Acts 1:11* that Jesus was lifted up into the clouds and disappeared.

His disciples were still looking up when two angels spoke to them and said: “...*why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.*” Since then, the Christian community has asked the question: “*When is Jesus returning?*” In *2 Timothy 4:8* we read that Jesus is called the *just judge* and how the church *longs for him to appear again*. The first Christians expressed this longing with a short prayer: “*Marana tha*” or “*Come, Lord*” (*1 Corinthians 16:22* and *Revelation 22:20*).

Bible Reading: 2 Peter 3:1-13 *(The day of the Lord will come)*

The first Christians thought it was going to happen soon. They wanted to be ready so they lived and prayed together. Some even refused to get married because they felt that Jesus would be back soon. This happened even though Jesus told the disciples: “*It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority*” (*Acts 1:7*). As the years passed and Jesus did not return, some began to doubt his word. However, those who were faithful to his promise believed as we do today, that Jesus will return for the final judgment of the living and the dead when the time is right. This will take place at the end of the world as *2 Peter* describes. As faithful Christians we must be ready for the Lord’s coming at any time, because we do not know when it will happen. It may happen in our lifetime or maybe a million years from now. Life can be hard as we struggle to be good and live according to God’s will. We must face temptations from within ourselves and from without in other people and things. The Bible encourages us to remain faithful to Christ just as Christ was faithful to God. We should keep in mind how he also was tempted by Satan in the desert: “*Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world undergo the same sufferings*” (*1 Peter 5:8-9*). As we wait and pray, we should recall what the Bible tells us about Christ’s return.

Bible Reading: 2 Thessalonians: 2:1-17 *(Christians need not be alarmed or shaken)*

As this reading says, while we are still on this earth the best preparation for his coming is to keep our hearts strong through good deeds and words. In the end, when Christ returns to review our lives, we will not be judged by how religious we appeared to be, but by how we treated our fellow human beings. Sometimes we hear people say about someone: “They’ve got religion.” True religion means loving our neighbor who needs our help, our forgiveness, our

understanding, and our patience and our prayers. We will be judged by how much we forgave others because God forgave us. Jesus was very clear about this in his teachings while he was on earth. Anyone who reads the gospels can not miss this all important point. The author of *1 John* 2:9-10 says, “*Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him to cause a fall.*” If we have been kind and merciful to others, we have nothing to fear when the time comes to face the truth of Christ’s judgment. This judgment will take place both at the time of our own death, and when all humanity is called before Christ at the end of time when “*...the earth and everything done on it will be found out*” (*2 Peter* 3:10). On this side of eternity, the time between our death and the final judgment could look like a thousand or even a million years. For God who lives only “now” it is in an instant: “*...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like on day*” (*2 Peter* 3:8).

Bible Reading: *Matthew* 25: 31-46 (*We will be judged by our deeds*)

The most important lesson that the last judgment teaches us is that true religion is about *mercy*. As followers of Christ we are called to be merciful to others, to treat them as we ourselves would like to be treated. Or, to put it in another way, we should treat others as we would treat Christ himself. In the end, Jesus told us that he does not want to act as our judge. It is our own actions that convict us. We have no one to blame but ourselves and we must be ready to accept the consequences of our deeds.

Bible Reading: *John* 3:17-21 (*All our deeds are seen by God*)

God did not send Jesus among us to condemn us. God’s will is that we might be saved by listening to the message of Christ and imitating the way he lived. In Christ’s coming among us it as if God is saying to us again: “*I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death...Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him*” (*Deuteronomy* 30:19-20). Our challenge as Christians is to become other Christs in the circumstances of our lives, in all our relationships, including our enemies. As the angels remind us at Christ’s ascension, we are not to stand around looking up at the sky. We are called to carry out the work of Christ.

We are called to live what the Church calls the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, based on Matthew’s account of the last judgment in (*Matthew* 25:34-40).

- The corporal (bodily) works of mercy are: *feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.*
- The spiritual works of mercy are: *instruct the ignorant, admonish the sinner, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, and pray for the living and the dead.*

We will study more about the *corporal and spiritual works of mercy* when we study the Church and the communion of saints in *Section 9*.



Think and Pray

Note: This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.

1. Have you ever heard people say that “the end is near”? How can they know this for sure?
2. Should you live in constant fear of your own death as well as the end of the world?
3. How should you prepare for your own death?
4. Does the Bible give us any suggestions about how to prepare for the coming of Christ at the end of time?
5. At the end of your life, how will you be judged? By Christ, or by our own actions?



8. I believe in the Holy Spirit.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #683-747)

SPIRIT

The Hebrew word for *spirit* can be translated into English as *breath* or *wind*. In the book of Genesis we read that the holy Spirit was present at the beginning of creation: “...*a mighty wind swept over the waters*” (*Genesis 1:2*). The Spirit or breath of God also brought life to the first human being: “*the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being*” (*Genesis 2:7*). During the history of the Israelites, the Spirit guide their lives through those who were called to be prophets. The great prophet Ezekiel explained it like this: “...*then spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me*” (*Ezekiel 3:24*). In this way God’s Spirit raised up leaders and prophets to keep the people faithful.

The same Spirit was present at the beginning of the world and at the beginning of the Christ’s life and work. That is why it is called the “new creation.” When the angel Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she would give birth to a son, he explained that it was God’s Spirit who would make this possible: “*The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*” (*Luke 1:35*). In a beautiful prophecy Isaiah speaks about the coming of the Messiah:

*“But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
A spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,...”* (*Isaiah 11:1-2*).

Before Jesus began his ministry, he went to be baptized by his cousin John. When Jesus came out of the river Jordan after his baptism, “...*he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him*” (*Matthew 3:16*). After the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray, he began his ministry with the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,...”* (*Luke 4:18*).

This passage about the Messiah’s mission to the poor and suffering is found in *Isaiah 61:1-2*. It also is important to realize that the Spirit who appeared at the beginning of the Church’s ministry is the same Spirit who appeared to Jesus during his baptism as a dove, and was with him all during

his earthly ministry.

Bible Reading: Luke 4: 1-13 (*The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert*)

From this passage and in the one that follows (verses 18 and 19) Jesus gives his “opening speech.” It is clear that the *Spirit of the Lord* is upon him as he begins his ministry. The Spirit continued to be with Jesus in his preaching and miracles, helping him bring about the coming of God’s kingdom.

Bible Reading: Matthew 12: 22-29 (*Jesus works by the Spirit of God*)

During his ministry, Jesus spoke often to his disciples about sending the Spirit. The Spirit would be an advocate (or helper) for them once he had risen from the dead and returned to his Father: “*When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me*” (John 15:26). Finally, at Pentecost, when his disciples had gathered together in one place the Spirit arrived “...like a strong driving wind...” (Acts 2:2) and “*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak...as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim*” (Acts 2:4). This Spirit gave them the courage to set aside their fear and proclaim the gospel of Jesus. On that day, Peter preached to thousands of people who had gathered in Jerusalem for the holy day. This same Spirit also guided and strengthened Christ’s followers from that day forward, helping them become the new people of God—the Church.

Bible Reading: Acts 2: 14-41 (*The people accept the gift of the Holy Spirit*)

Peter served the newly formed church as its leader, just as Jesus had planned (Matthew 16:18). As the leader of the apostles he spoke on behalf of them all. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit Peter was the first in a long line of spiritual leaders called *pope* (from *papa*) who have led the Church in good and bad times. The pope continues the work of Peter, guiding the Catholic community as its shepherd. He defends the and explains Christ’s teachings, so that his followers can be sure of the truth.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to guide and strengthen Christ’s followers who are his Body, the Church. Both the clergy and lay people make up the Church and the Holy Spirit is with them in a number of ways:

- *in the Bible which the Holy Spirit inspired,*
- *in the tradition of the apostles which the church faithfully hands on to each generation,*
- *in the church’s teaching authority which it helps,*
- *in the sacraments and Eucharist which unite us with Christ,*
- *in prayer where the Spirit intercedes for us,*
- *in the gifts and ministries which build up the church,*
- *in the church’s mission to spread the gospel,*
- *in the witness of the saints who show forth God’s holiness to the world.*

Because Jesus gave us the Spirit, we “...were called for freedom” (Galatians 5:13) and “...live in the Spirit...” (Galatians 5:25) as members of God’s family. God is truly our loving and forgiving father and we have the privilege to speak to him as his own children: “*As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’*” Galatians 4:6. (*Abba* is an Aramaic word that means *papa*). This one word sums up how loved we are by God. It shows the special closeness that we Christians share as members of God’s household. The special role of the Holy Spirit is to unite us and guide us.



Think and Pray

Note: This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.

1. The Holy Spirit is called the *third person of the Trinity*. Although the word *trinity* is not in the Bible, read *John 15:26*. What does that passage teach about the Holy Spirit?
2. As a follower of Jesus living in his Spirit, how do you live the life of the Trinity? Read *I John 4:7-12* and then put it in your own words.
3. After reading *Galatians 5:22-23*, how would you describe the *fruits* of the Spirit? How are you building up the community of believers if you have these gifts?
4. How does the Spirit help us pray? Read *Romans 8:26*. What are the reasons that people groan? (Think about frustration, anger, sadness, humor, etc.). How can your groaning be turned into a prayer?
5. What are we freed from as God's children? See *Romans 8:14-17*.
6. Do you believe that the Spirit is guiding the Church today? In what ways do you believe this is happening?



9. The holy catholic church, the communion of saints.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #748-975)

Membership in the Catholic church means more than belonging to an organization or gathering in a special building. Nor is the Church just its leaders. Once they are baptized, all members share a special bond that is not like anything else. They are members of the *body of Christ*. The person who can best explain this Body is Christ himself. We find his own words about it in *Acts*, where we read how *Saul*, persecutor of Christians, is changed into *Paul* the apostle. Saul had left Jerusalem and was traveling to Damascus to find more Christians to punish. Suddenly he was knocked to the ground in a flash of light. “*He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him: ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ He said: ‘Who are you, sir?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’*” (*Acts* 9: 4-5). With a few simple words Jesus changed Paul forever. He also taught what the body of Christ means. Jesus is so close to his followers that whatever is done to them is done to him. It is the same teaching he gave long before he died, when he described the final judgment (*Matthew* 24:31-46). In this passage he explained that anyone who took care of the sick, clothed the naked, or visited the imprisoned did these things to *him*. It is both a comfort and a challenge to realize that as baptized members of his Church, we belong to this same body of Christ.

Because Paul never forgot this encounter with Christ, he taught this truth very clearly. He often wrote to the early Christian converts about this special unity : “*Now you are Christ’s body and individually parts of it*” (*I Corinthians* 12:27). Like a physical body, this spiritual body has many parts, each with its own job to do, each with a responsibility for the welfare of the whole body. In a physical body the feet take the body from one place to another. The hands bring food and drink to the mouth. The eyes guide the body and keep it from danger. The head guides the whole body by its thoughts. Each part works with the other parts to help the whole body stay alive. It is also like this for Christ’s body which is the Church. In this body, Christ is the head and we are the members of his body. Each Christian has a part to play in the life and health of Christ’s community, *no matter who they are or where they are*. Each of us has a gift which benefits all the others. Some members are bishops, priests, deacons, nuns, monks, and lay people, living under the guidance and leadership of one shepherd, the pope—Christ’s representative on earth.

Bible Reading: *I Peter* 2:1-10 (*Now we are God’s people*)

As Christ’s followers, we never live alone but are always one with *others*. Life is not just “Jesus and me.” As baptized members of Christ’s body we are *priests, prophets and kings*. We are a priestly people who offer Christ’s perfect prayer of sacrifice. We are God’s royal family and “reign” like Christ by serving the needs of others. And we live in this world as prophets who stand for the truth. All together we make a temple where God dwells: “*...in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*” (*Ephesians* 2:22).

Bible Reading: *Ephesians 4:11-16* (*Growing up in the body of Christ*)

Because we belong to the same body, we share the same faith, the same hope, and the same love. This love for one another and all humanity reaches out in good deeds. Whatever happens to one happens to all - to everyone including Jesus the head of the body, just as he taught us: "...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (*Matthew 25:40*).

Bible Reading: *Romans 12:4-20* (*Love holds the body together*)

Jesus gave his followers the commandment to *love one another*. Living in a community of believers also tests how well we live what we say we believe. Our faith challenges us to care for one another. This means looking out for the safety and well-being of our brothers and sisters in God's family. We must work together to serve the needs of others, loving others as if they were ourselves. Jesus gives his followers a new way to behave that reverses the way the world does things. Those who want to be *first* must become *servants*. Even Jesus did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve God's plan by giving his life in order to set people free (*Matthew 20: 25-28*). Jesus turns the world's values upside down in his family. Hopefully the world will see Christ's way of loving service in the example we give. It was said of the first Christians who lived in the midst of pagans: "*they must be Christians, see how they love one another.*" As we will see, that love is nourished by the Word of God and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

Bible Reading: *John 17:21-23* (*Christ prays for his followers*)

The Church has four special signs by which it is recognized as the one Christ founded. It is *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*.

- It is one because all its members are one in faith, share in the same seven sacraments, in the one sacrifice of the Mass, and live as one under one leader (*2 Peter 1:1*). This visible leader of the Church is the pope who is the successor of Peter (*Matthew 16:18-19*). This teaching authority keeps the Church from error by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.
- It is holy because Jesus who is its head is holy, the Spirit that Jesus sent strengthens us to be holy, and the Church invites all human beings to live a holy life (*John 6:69, John 16:7-8, and Hebrews 12:14*). It also has been said that the Church is holy because all of its members, although sinners, are forgiven. "*They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the LORD*" (*Isaiah 62:12*). This is a holiness which all of us can attain, this is why Christians are referred to in the Bible as the "saints" because they have been healed by God (saint=*sanus*=whole or sane).
- It is catholic (which means *universal*) because it has the source of truth which it shares in every time and with every nation on earth (*Matthew 28:19-20* and *1 Timothy 3:15*). It is the world-wide mission of the Church to teach the gospel to all people (*Mark 16:15*). It is universal in its liturgy, the Mass, which we can attend anywhere in the world and feel at home.
- It is apostolic because it is faithful to the teaching of the apostles and therefore stands on the apostles as its foundation (*Ephesians 2:20*). In this way the Church is guided infallibly in the

truth through Christ who governs it through Peter and the apostles, and their successors, the pope and the bishops gathered around him. When the pope speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, *from the chair* of Peter, he teaches the Church about faith and morals without error. That is what the Church means by the pope's *infallibility*. Its only purpose is to serve the well-being of the Church.

The Seven Sacraments

We enter the Church and continue living in it through seven sacred actions that Christ gave to his followers. They are signs that lead us to Christ and his saving grace. The sacraments help us in three ways: 1) grow together in holiness, 2) minister to others in need, and 3) worship God.

1. Through **Baptism** we are born again into God's family (*John 3:5-7*). We are cleansed of sin (*1 Peter 3:24*) as we promise to follow Christ, not Satan (*James 4:7*).

Baptism in the Bible:

Ezekiel 36:25, Matthew 28:19, Mark 1:9-11, John 4:14, Romans 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:27-28, Ephesians 4:5.

2. Through **Confirmation** we are given power by the Holy Spirit to witness to the gospel (*Luke 24:49*), and serve his Church generously (*Acts 1:8*). This sacrament helps us pray, love God's word (*Colossians 3:16*), serve others and witness to Christ in the world (*Romans 5:5*).

Confirmation in the Bible:

Isaiah 11:2, Isaiah 61:1, Ezekiel 36:26, Joel 3:1, Mark 1:10, Luke 4:18, John 7:38, Acts 8:17, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Ephesians 1:13.

3. Through the **Eucharist** we receive the body and blood of Christ (*Matthew 26:26-28*). The bread and wine we offer are changed into Christ's body and blood in memory of him. This real presence among us (*1 Corinthians 10:16-17*) unites us to himself and one another.

Eucharist in the Bible:

Exodus 24:8, Deuteronomy 8:3, 1 Kings 19:8, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 24:35, John 6:51-55, Acts 2:40-41, Acts 10:40-41, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

4. Through **Reconciliation** (or Confession) the sins we commit after Baptism are forgiven, as Jesus promised (*John 20:23*). This forgiveness depends on a contrite heart, a spirit of repentance, humble confession of our sins, and doing something to make up for what we did wrong (*2 Corinthians 1:5* and *5:18*).

Reconciliation in the Bible:

2 Samuel 12:13, Ezekiel 18:30, Joel 2:12-13, Jonah 3:10, Psalm 51:5, Psalm 130:1, Matthew 9:5-6, Mark 1:15, Luke 7:47, Luke 15:21, Luke 24:47, 1 John 1:9.

5. Through the **Anointing of the Sick** Christ continues his earthly ministry to our souls and bodies (*Mark 6:7-13*). When the priest anoints those who are sick with oil (*James 5:14-16*) their sins are forgiven and their bodies are entrusted to God's care.

Anointing of the Sick in the Bible:

Matthew 8:14-17, Mark 16:18, Luke 10:34, Luke 13:13, Acts 28:8-9, 1 Corinthians 12:9.

6. Through **Holy Orders** some members of the Church are set aside to continue Christ's ministry on earth (*Acts 6:3-4, Romans 15:15-16, Colossians 1:25*). As priests they serve the Church as shepherds and teachers, continuing the ministry of the apostles (*Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-12, and 1 Timothy 4:13-15*).

Holy Orders in the Bible:

Matthew 9:38, Matthew 20:27-28, Luke 10:2, John 20:22-23, John 21:17, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, 2 Timothy 1:6, Romans 12:6, 2 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:18, 1 Peter 5:3-4.

7. Through **Marriage** Christ blesses the union of husbands and wives (*Ephesians 5:22-32*). No one can force a man and woman to end this bond. Jesus taught: "*They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together let no man separate*" (*Matthew 19:6, and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11*).

Marriage in the Bible:

Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:18-25, Mark 10:6-8, John 2:1-11, Romans 8:35, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 1 Corinthians 13:2, Ephesians 5:2, Colossians 3:14, 1 Peter 3:8, 1 John 4:8.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS:

Those who are joined to Christ by baptism form a *union* of both the living and the dead. This is true because in Christ there is no end to the love Christians share with themselves and with God. In other words, as the saying goes, "love knows no bounds." This invisible union is called the *communion of saints*. *Saints* is a word that the Bible uses to describe ordinary members of the Church. We are called "holy ones" (*Ephesians 1:15-16*) not because we are perfect and sinless, but because we are sinners who have been forgiven. We are members of the Church who have heard the call of Jesus who said: "*I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners*" (*Luke 5:32*). The word "saint" comes from the Latin word *sanus*, which actually means *whole* or *healthy*. We can say that by the healing power of God's forgiveness we have been made healthy and whole persons again. Staying holy is a constant effort. We will only be perfect when we are in heaven with God and all the other *saints*.

The Church also teaches that the saints in heaven have not forgotten us and pray for us (*Revelation 8:3-4 and Hebrews 7:25*). During the the Eucharist (or Mass) prayers are offered for those who have died, but every baptized person, whether living or dead, is a witness to Christ's sacrifice. This union is like a great wheel (or like the rose windows of our churches) where time and eternity revolve around Christ who is the center of everything.

Whether Christians are living at this moment or lived hundreds of years ago, they are all one in Christ. Jesus explained his special place in time and eternity when he said: "*Amen, Amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM*" (*John 8:58*). As he says in *Revelation 1:8*: "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,...the one who is and who was, and who is to come, the almighty.*"

Being a member of Christ's body is both a *privilege* and a *responsibility*. As Christ's followers we have the right and duty to carry on his mission of caring for others in both body and soul.

Caring for the physical needs of others is called the *corporal* works of mercy. Caring for their spiritual needs is called the *spiritual* works of mercy. There are seven of each works and they are based on the Word of God:

The Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy:

1. To convert the sinner (*Acts 2:40-41; James 5:19-20*).
2. To instruct the ignorant (*Acts 8:35-39*).
3. To counsel the doubtful (*1 Thessalonians 5:9-11*).
4. To comfort the sorrowful (*Romans 12:15*).
5. To bear wrongs patiently (*1 Corinthians 13:5*).
6. To forgive injuries (*Matthew 18:21-22*).
7. To pray for the living and the dead (*James 5:16*).

The Seven Corporal (Bodily) Works of Mercy:

1. To feed the hungry (*Matthew 25:34-40*).
2. To give drink to the thirsty (*Matthew 10:42*).
3. To clothe the naked (*Luke 3:11*).
4. To shelter the homeless (*Hebrews 13:2*).
5. To visit the sick (*James 5:14*).
6. To visit the imprisoned (*Hebrews 13:3*).
7. To bury the dead (*Acts 5:6 and 8:2*).

Not only do we have a duty to care for others as members of Christ's body, we also have a duty to care for ourselves as well. Our bodies and souls are gifts of God's creation which are worthy of respect and proper care. The body is the vessel through which God's work is carried out. It also is the dwelling place of our soul and God's presence. We are rightfully called *temples* of the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine once said "*God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.*"

Although we are asked to do penance, we must never cause harm to our health. We are also to take great care of our souls. As forgiven members of the *communion of saints* we are still living in the world and we are subject to all kinds of temptations. These temptations to depart from the Christian life come from within us in our own *flesh* and from outside of us in the *world* and *Satan*.

Flesh is understood as our tendency as fallen human beings to focus completely and selfishly on ourselves (*Romans 8:6-8*).

World is understood as those things which begin to mean more to us than God: possessions, pleasures, and power.

Satan is the evil force that the Bible teaches is a person, who seeks to draw us away from God. Satan was described in the life of Jesus when he tempted Jesus in the desert.

In baptism we are called to renounce these temptations and live for Christ. These are promises that we must try our best to keep for the rest of our lives until we are safely home in eternity.



Think and Pray

Note: This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.

1. It took 2,000 years for the news about Jesus to get from one person to the next until it reached *you*. What do you feel about this human chain of faith? Why does God use people, including you, to spread the news about his love to human beings?
2. Which of the *spiritual* works of mercy can you do right where you are?
3. Which of the *corporal* works of mercy can you carry out right where you are?
4. Why are the sacraments and being *one with the body of Christ* so important?
5. Why would Paul the apostle call you a *saint*?



10. The forgiveness of sins.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #976-987)

In the previous section we learned that in Baptism all our sins are forgiven. They are taken away as we are washed with water and the Holy Spirit. However, this does not mean that we will never sin again. There is a saying: *“To err is human, to forgive is divine.”* This means that all human beings struggle with weakness and will do something sinful. We cannot escape this fact of our imperfect human nature. Therefore, no one can say they have never sinned. That is why the Bible says: *“If we say, ‘We are without sin’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8)*. Baptism placed us on the right path, but how do we get back to it after we have fallen by the side of the road? Who will help us get up again?

Bible Reading: Romans 7:14-25 *(We overcome our sins through Jesus)*

As human beings we know well the weakness that is part of us. We make a promise to be good and then break that promise. We feel strong one minute, and the next we are falling apart when tempted to forget our goals and loved ones, and think only of ourselves. Although temptations are not sins, they are powerful reminders of our tendency to be weak and selfish. Jesus clearly understood the human problem in *Matthew 15:18-20* where he spoke about the things that make us unclean: *“...the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy. These are what defile a person...”* No one knows this better than God who still loves us, and has given us a way to be rescued. We cannot do it on our own. We need the strong hand of God to take hold of us and save us from the problems that can overwhelm us:

*“God, in your great kindness answer me
with our constant help.
Rescue me from the mire;
do not let me sink” (Psalm 69:14-15).*

Bible Reading: John 8:1-11 *(Jesus and the woman caught in sin)*

Forgiveness does not come cheaply, however. First of all, Jesus died for it. Secondly, we must repent to receive what is waiting for us. In the gospels we learn that whenever Jesus forgave someone, he ended by saying: *“...from now on do not sin any more” (John 8:11)*. In the cross of Christ we see a powerful sign from God. It stands for God’s *sacred covenant* with us. The cross signals that God is faithful to his word and will never go back on his promise—if we return to him with all our hearts and ask for his forgiveness we will forgive us. In Jesus crucified and raised up we see God’s promise to never give up on us. Like Dismas, the convict crucified next to him, we can believe that we have another chance to turn away from the wrongs we have done. We know that nothing we have done is unforgivable if only we truly repent.

Bible Reading: Luke 15:11-32 *(The lost son returns home)*

God is the father that Jesus described in the story of the prodigal son. We are like the son who ran away to spend all his money, and forgot about the love that filled his father's heart. In our sins we ran away from God, spending our time and energy on thinking only of ourselves and empty promises. In Jesus on the cross, with his heart pierced by the lance, we see God's heart pierced by our sins. But just like the water and blood that flowed from the heart of Jesus, God's heart overflows with love and forgiveness that can wash us clean: "...the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Like the father in Luke's story, God is waiting for us at home, ready to give us forgiveness and peace of heart in his arms. No one can take this from us because it comes from God alone and our total trust in his mercy. His mercy has no end - it is *always* there for us.

Bible Reading: Luke 15:1-7 (*The joy in heaven when a sinner repents*)

Nothing has changed our lives more than this one truth: *despite all our wrongdoing, we are forgiven*. This means that God is always waiting for us and is willing to forgive our sins whenever we turn to him and truly repent. This forgiveness flows from God's unconditional love for us. He is our maker "...to whom we belong" as *Psalms* 100:3 reminds us. God's loving forgiveness is what Jesus lived to teach us about and died defending for us. Jesus tells us that there will be more joy in heaven over the one sinner who repented, than over the ninety-nine good people. God really does love sinners! It is in the Bible, and that is God's *word*.

There is a beautiful poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins called "*The Hound of Heaven*." In this poem the poet describes God as the *hound*, and we are the animal he is chasing. We may spend our lives trying to run, or hide from God, but in the end he corners us and we cannot escape his love. We have to surrender to God because his love is bigger and stronger than us. The poem tells us that God will never give up on us because he loves us.

We can cling to this life-giving truth...*there is always hope in God's loving forgiveness*.

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION - CONFESSING OUR SINS

If we are assured of God's forgiveness, why does the Catholic Church teach that we must confess our serious sins to a priest in order to receive forgiveness? What is serious sin? Why is it so important to confess to another human being?

It is true that during our baptism we were cleansed of all past sins. However, even after we promised to follow Christ, we still fail as weak human beings. Because we hurt ourselves and one another we are called to a ministry of reconciliation, to restore the damage we've done. Jesus calls us to "...go first and be reconciled with your brother" (*Matthew* 5:24).

It is true that the Bible teaches that every sin can be forgiven in God's mercy, but it also teaches us that we must *confess* our sins and try to restore the wrongs we have done. Confessing sins is nothing new. It begins with the Old Testament. In *2 Samuel* 12:13 we read that David confessed his sin of adultery and murder to the prophet Nathan: "*Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.'*" *Nathan answered David: 'The LORD on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die.'*" In the New Testament we read in *James* 5:15-16 how the sick person should be visited by representatives of the Church to be anointed in the Lord's name and, "*If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray*

for one another, that you may be healed.” In 1 John 1:9 we read that before we are forgiven we must first confess our sins: “If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.”

Through the sacrament of confession the Church is fulfilling the words that Christ spoke to his disciples before he returned to heaven: “...he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained’ ” (John 20:22-23).

Ever since Christ shared this power with his Church it has wisely used it to bring healing, forgiveness and peace to countless people. It is an awesome responsibility, one that takes serious preparation, both on the part of the priest, who officially represents the Church, and the person who confesses. The person who is confessing must have a clear understanding of their sin, be truly sorry for it, confess it out loud to the priest, ask for forgiveness, promise to do better and do whatever form of penance the priest gives.

Through the words of the priest, who represents the Church, the repentant sinner hears the beautiful words of forgiveness: “*I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*” It is important to remember that the priest does not say these words in his own name, but in the name of the entire Church and the Trinity.

Examination of Conscience:

Understanding our sins clearly takes serious study of God’s commandments. As we prepare for confession, we take ourselves quietly through an examination of our conscience. We take a look at each of the commandments and ask ourselves if we have disobeyed them in any way. The Church teaches that there are venial and mortal sins. Venial sins are not so serious. We may be impatient, bend the truth a little, act disrespectfully toward another person, or steal their book. There are greater sins, called as *mortal* sins because they destroy our spiritual life and the spiritual lives of others. Again, Jesus listed these in *Matthew* 15:18-20.

Christian Morality:

Over the centuries, the Church studied the Bible and human behavior, and gained a deep understanding of what is right and wrong. The ten commandments remained very important as a guide for human behavior, but now they were seen in the light of Christ’s gospel. This is called *Christian morality*. (Christian morality will be *Part 3* of this faith study series). The Church’s teaching on morality covers how we treat God, our neighbor and ourselves. Christian morality helps us discover who we are, and what we are to do if we are to become the beings God wants us to be. It starts with our dignity as persons who are created “...in the divine image” (*Genesis* 1:27).

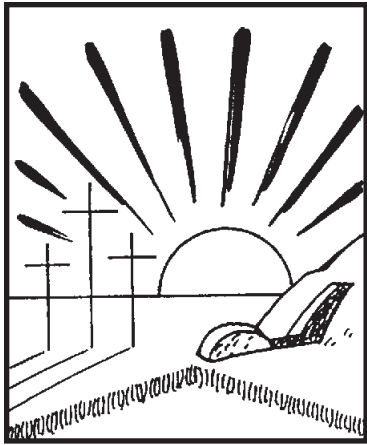
Our calling is to follow Christ as children of God in order to share in his life and happiness. Through the actions that we freely choose, we either go closer to or away from our goal of becoming the *saints* that God wants us to be. Jesus summed up the entire law in these words: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...You shall love your neighbor as yourself...*” (*Mark* 12:31).



Think and Pray

Note: This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.

1. Think about how your life would be if God was not forgiving and did not give the cross of Jesus as a promise of his forgiveness. How is your life different knowing this truth?
2. Does understanding God's forgiveness help you understand better who God is?
3. How can understanding our own weakness give you more understanding of others?
4. What does it mean to say that a Christian is called to live *beyond* the law? Does this mean Christians are outlaws?
5. How does Christian morality help you discover who you are and how you are to live?



11. The resurrection of the body.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #988-1019)

OUR BODY IS A GIFT FROM THE CREATOR

As followers of Christ we believe that our bodies are a wonderful gift from God who created them with wisdom and love. Anyone who takes the time to study how the body works, how its millions of invisible cells work together, how digestion takes place, how the brain works, how we see, hear and speak, how a child is conceived and born, realizes the awesome work of the Creator. In addition, God is present in us as the *power* that keeps us alive. And God is the *Spirit* that guides our lives as followers of Christ: *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body”* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

To be alive is truly a miracle. In the light of God’s plan, it makes sense to have respect for our bodies, to take good care of them. It is important to eat well, exercise, and not abuse them with too much food or the wrong kind of food, to ruin them with alcohol and drugs, to bring harm to ourselves and others because of our misuse of sex, and to harm ourselves and others through violence. Just as we respect our own bodies, we must respect the bodies of others. Still, the body is an instrument toward a spiritual goal, not an end in itself. We are called to be devoted to God: *“Train yourself for devotion, for, while physical training is of limited value, devotion is valuable in every respect, since it holds a promise of life both for the present and for the future”* (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

As Christians our most important task is to see that our spirit does not become sick. In his plan to save us from our sickness of sin, God sent a savior into our world who took a body like ours. Jesus was born in a humble stable, nursed and cared for by Mary, and taught the carpenter’s trade by Joseph. When the time came to teach in public, he lived by the words he spoke, suffered for the truth, and willingly died for the forgiveness of our sins. He did all this in and through his body, so that we would be with him in heaven one day, body and soul. *“We have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Hebrews 10:10). For this reason we see how important the body has been in God’s plan for our salvation.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

God also had another plan for the body of our savior Christ. As Catholics we also believe that the real body (and blood) of Christ which we receive in the Eucharist, is not only a *reminder* of what he did for us, and is also a *promise of future glory* with him. Why? Because we are one with him. He is our head and we are his members, joined together by our love for one another in Christ. Because we one with Christ’s body that is raised from the dead, we believe Christ will return to raise our bodies too. Our bodies will rise from the dead and we will be like Christ in body and soul. This understanding comes from Jesus himself who taught that he is the living bread and if we believe in him we will rise with him.

Bible Reading John 6:26-58 (*Whoever eats this bread will live forever*)

Nature gives us an example of how to understand this great mystery. Let us think about the bread we use for the Eucharist. The grains of wheat that are ground to flour were the *seeds of hope* which the parent plant produces in order to continue its life in the next season. These seeds are gathered, ground into flour, and baked into the bread we use for the body of Christ who is our *hope of eternal life*. It is the same with the grapes that are pressed into wine. God blesses and uses nature to carry out his will. This is how God chose to do things, and we are part of his plan. With our bodies and souls, we are meant to carry out his will like Jesus did, and to live with him forever. Therefore, as human beings we are either on our way to heaven or looking for that way. The way to eternal life is clear, if only we follow the path that Christ showed us in his life, death, and rising from the dead. Therefore, our bodies are part of God's sacred plan. They have a beautiful purpose: to glorify God in this life, and to live with him forever in the next life. With Paul we can say: "*For to me life is Christ, and death is gain*" (*Philippians 1:21*). Jesus gave us a sign of this victory over death when he raised Lazarus.

Bible Reading: John 11:1-45 (*The raising of Lazarus*)

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

The risen body of Jesus was a different kind of body than the one he had before he died. After he rose from the dead he was not a ghost. Jesus proved it by asking the apostles for something to eat and then eating it in front of them. His body was different than our own, however. He was able to appear and disappear mysteriously. The walls and locked doors could not keep him out, even though the apostles had locked the doors because they were afraid. Jesus could do this because after he died and rose, he was living in a new way, beyond our every day life. It is a way of living that each of us will know when we are raised from the dead and live with God in glory. "*Thus we shall always be with the Lord*" (*1 Thessalonians 4:17*).

What will happen to us after we die? What will heaven be like? We must wait to find out what it will be like. Waiting may be one of the hardest things to do, but even in this life it is part of the way things are. We wait for someone we've never met to arrive. We wait for the mail to come, and to see what the thing we ordered looks like. We wait to be released from prison not knowing what life will be like for us on the outside. Likewise, in our spiritual life we must live with the mystery and wait for the answer to come in due time. We can turn to nature for help in understanding the change that will take place as we go from life on this earth to life in heaven. It is like the growth of an oak tree. It starts with a very small acorn, which looks nothing like the great tree that it will become. Likewise, what we will be like after we become what God wants for us is a mystery. The Bible only gives us a hint of what we will become as God's children: "*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" (*1 John 3:2*). We conclude with Paul's teaching about the resurrection in the following:

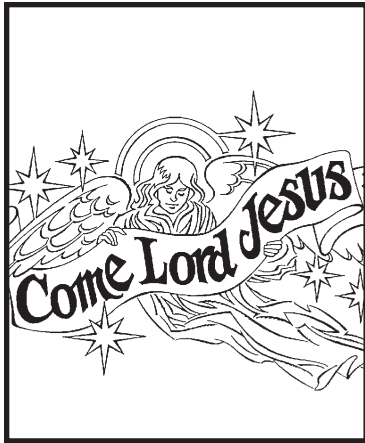
Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-58 (*The resurrection of Christ*)



Think and Pray

Note: This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.

1. What should be your attitude as a Christian when you finally face death?
2. What should our attitude be toward your time on earth, your relationships with others and your possessions?
3. What should your attitude be as a Christian toward your own body or the bodies of others?
4. Why is the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, a *pledge of future glory*?



12. And life everlasting. Amen.

(Read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1020-1065)

ETERNAL LIFE

God has planted in our hearts a longing for eternal life. From the day we were born, we began a journey toward our true home in heaven. We want to be with God in heaven and see him face to face. Each day is another chance to get closer to our goal, to get ready for the day when we pass through death's door into our

heavenly home. God will be waiting for us, to wrap his arms around us and welcome us. Jesus spoke about that final, joyful day:

“ ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ ” (Matthew 25:34).

One day a man came up to Jesus and asked him this question: *“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17)*. This is a question that each of us needs to ask. We may try to distract ourselves with everyday life, so that we do not think about it very often. Nevertheless, whether we realize it or not, it is a question that God has planted deep within our hearts: *“how can I be happy forever?”* This desire to be happy drives us in many directions looking for it. Let us look at the answer Jesus gave to this person. It also is the answer to our own question.

Bible Reading: Mark 10:17-31 *(God offers us eternal life)*

At first, Jesus simply told the rich man to keep the commandments faithfully. However, Jesus looked into the heart of this man with love but saw where his weakness was. Because of that he gave him a more difficult challenge. He invited the man to give up all his possessions and join him and his group of disciples. In giving this man such a challenge, Jesus brought to light the deepest secret of the man's heart. This man was rich and liked the power of buying things and looking good in the eyes of others. Maybe for him eternal life was just the last, greatest thing he could buy and own. He would have the greatest prize of all. But in the light of God's truth Jesus revealed the man's greatest weakness. If he was proud of how he looked before God and others Jesus now asked him to take a closer, more truthful look at himself and let go of everything he owned. After the man walked away, Jesus warned his followers that being rich is more than possessing things. The truth is, some rich people are very generous with the Church and with those in need. Some poor people keep what little they have to themselves. Jesus was saying that being rich is an *attitude*: *“Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:24)*.

Like this rich man it is easy to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are doing fine and do not need to change, or that we have it all. Yet our pride may be hiding just below the surface. A rich person may have a humble heart, and a poor person may be full of himself. Who we really are depends on what God sees in our hearts. God is pure truth. We can never lie to him about anything. We cannot cover up or hide from him the reasons why we do something. For this reason Jesus taught how important it is to have a pure heart: *“Blessed are the clean of heart” (Matthew 5:8)*. He knew it was tempting to be full of ourselves—to be rich with pride and selfishness. In order to gain eternal life, we must *“let go and let God”* as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) says.

This means we must be willing to submit everything to God and his judgment. This includes our relationships with people and things, and even our deepest thoughts, attitudes, and opinions of ourselves. God's light must shine on everything so that we see it in his light. We will see how we need God's help if we are to become the person God created us to be. St. Nicholas of Flüeli (1417-1487 A.D.) who was a lay person with a family of ten children and could not read or write. He composed this beautiful prayer about seeking God with all your heart:

*My Lord and my God,
Take from me everything that keeps me away from you.
Give me everything that brings me closer to you.
Separate me from my selfishness to give my all to you.*

Living as a follower of Christ is a life-long journey. No matter how many times we fail, we must never despair of reaching our eternal goal. We must believe that God does not give up on us. When the disciples remarked: “ ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God’ ” (Mark 10: 26-27). God's heart is bigger than ours. God's heart is a never-ending fountain of mercy, giving us new life and hope. That is why the gospels teach that forgiveness and everlasting life are connected. Even though we are sinners, we begin to have a taste of eternal life on earth even before we die because we have been forgiven. The Church teaches that all who die in God's grace can be confident they are saved, however, after death they still may need to be spiritually purified before entering heaven. The Church calls this final stage *purgatory*. It is not a place. It is a state or phase that the soul experiences such as *Malachi* 3:2 describes,

*“But who will endure the day of his coming?
And who can stand when he appears?
For he is like the refiner's fire...”*

After we cross the “finish line” of our human race we will shed all the sins and struggles we have carried on earth. The last book of the Bible describes how God welcomes us: “*He will wipe every tear from their eyes...*” (*Revelation* 21:4). We will be home at last, safe in the arms of God who loves us more than we can ever imagine.

Amen.

Amen is a Hebrew word meaning “*it is so*” or “*so be it.*” In our common way of agreeing with something we might say, “*that's right!*” The last book of the Bible ends with this short but beautiful prayer: “*Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!*” (*Revelation* 22:20). So we end this study by praying that we will accept with open hearts everything in this Creed, that it will take root in us, inspire us and transform us, so that we will inherit everlasting life with God.

We end this part of the faith study with the beautiful words of St. Augustine:

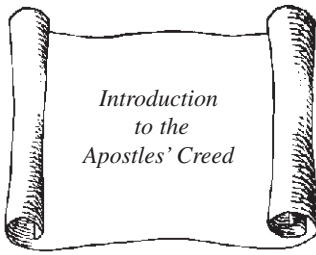
*May your Creed
be for you as a mirror.
Look at yourself in it,
to see if you believe everything
you say you believe.
And rejoice in your faith each day.*



Think and Pray

Note: *This is not a test page. It is only to think and pray about.*

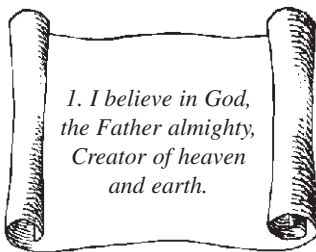
1. What does forgiveness have to do with everlasting life?
2. What must you do *to inherit eternal life*? In other words, what is blocking you from giving your heart completely to God?
3. Why are the followers of Christ never totally at home in this world?



Review Test Introduction

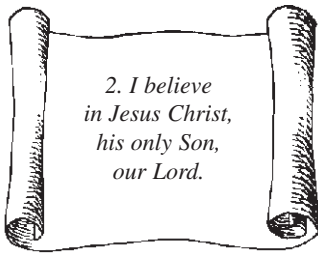
After completing, all 3 test pages review and correct them with the study coordinator.
Be sure to put your name and ID number on each test page.

1. The word *creed*, from the Latin *credo*, means _____
2. Why is the Apostles' Creed give its name? _____
3. In *Genesis*, after God made everything, He looked it and found it _____
4. We are alive because of our own human power. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
5. What is the great beauty and dignity that no one can take from us? _____
6. As God's children we are made for this purpose: _____
7. According to *Deuteronomy* 6:5 how are we to love God? _____
8. According to *Exodus* 3:14 what is God's name? _____
9. "Abba" is the special word Jesus used when he prayed to God. What does it mean? _____
10. Jesus went out of his way to avoid talking and eating with sinners. ___ True ___ False (circle one)



Review Test Section 1

1. Our faith begins with God the first person of _____
2. After God made all things, including human beings, he looked at them and found them to be _____
3. Although God is invisible what gives us some idea of what God is like? _____
4. As God's children we are made for what purpose? _____
5. How is the holy name of God spelled that the Israelites would not say out loud? _____
6. Why is Jesus the greatest teacher? _____
7. What greatest crime became the greatest good? _____
8. According to *Romans* 8:28 what works for good for those who love God? _____
9. What words do the official prayers of the Church begin with? _____
10. Why does evil not have the last word? What is God able to do? _____

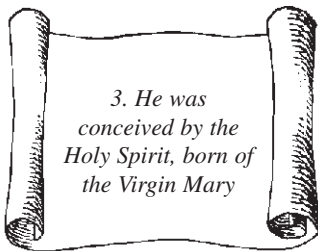


Review Test Section 2

1. Jesus comes from the Jewish name *Joshua* or Yeshua which means _____
2. In ancient times _____ was poured over someone's head as a sign of authority and power.
3. The kingdom that Jesus preached is God's kingdom of _____
4. What did God call Jesus when he was baptized in the Jordan River by John the baptist?

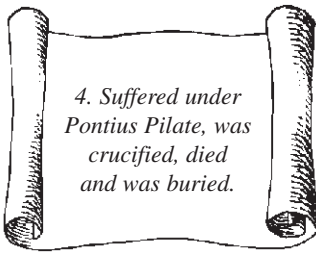
5. Jesus was never tempted. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
6. Why did many people turn away from Jesus after awhile?

7. The followers of Jesus gradually began to understand more clearly who he was. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
8. Who is known as the *doubting apostle*? _____
9. What title meant that Jesus was God? _____
10. Which author of the New Testament arrested Christians and put them in chains? _____



Review Test Section 3

1. Joseph thought about divorcing Mary. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
2. The "brothers of Jesus" means Mary was not a virgin. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
3. Jerome explained how *until* still meant Mary was _____ after Jesus was born.
4. A person is called *first-born* because they _____ not because _____
5. Why did Elizabeth call Mary *blessed*? _____
6. In what passage of the Bible do we find Mary's song? _____ What is it called in Latin? _____
7. God often chooses the _____, _____ and _____ to carry out his plan.
8. How can Mary be called the mother of God? _____
9. During his "hidden years" in Nazareth Jesus was famous as a child miracle-worker. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
10. Name three events in the New Testament where Mary is present: _____,
_____, and _____

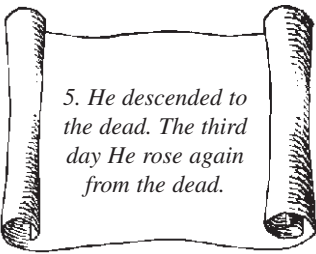


Review Test Section 4

After completing, all 3 test pages review and correct them with the study coordinator.
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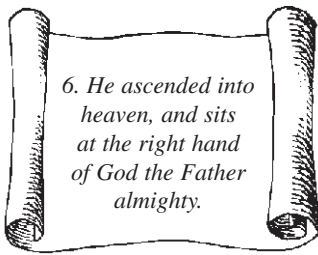
1. Why is it so important to say Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate? _____
2. Name 3 events that shed light on our understanding of the death of Jesus? _____

3. During our baptism we promised to reject _____ and _____
4. Name 2 things that made religious leaders angry at Jesus: _____
5. What was the real reason that Jesus died? _____ and _____
6. Why was it unusual for Jesus to cry out in a loud voice before he died? _____
7. What sealed God's treaty with us forever? _____
8. What did Isaiah predict about the Messiah? _____
9. When Jesus was dying what Psalm did he use to pray? _____
10. We are a Church of perfect people. ___ True ___ False (circle one)



Review Test Section 5

1. What 2 things showed that Jesus was really dead? _____
2. Where was Jesus while his body was in the tomb? _____
3. Why was the body of Jesus buried before sunset? _____
4. Who is often called "apostle to the apostles"? _____
5. Who was in the tomb when Jesus rose from the dead? _____
6. Jesus asked for _____ to prove that he was not a ghost.
7. What does the story of Thomas show? _____
8. Where do we find a list of the appearances of Jesus in the New Testament? _____
9. The risen body of Jesus was different than his earthly body. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
10. What does Paul use to explain how the dead will rise and grow into something completely new? _____



Review Test Section 6

1. After Christ returned to heaven where did he take his place?

2. According to the prophet Isaiah what did the hand of God do?

3. In the vision of the martyr Stephen where was Jesus? _____

4. What does Jesus do at God's right hand according to *Romans* 8:34? _____

5. According to *Ephesians* 1:18-23 what is the body of Christ? _____

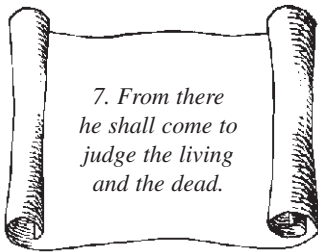
6. Jesus is not like a human ruler who rules by fear. He rules with _____ and _____

7. Even in heaven Jesus continues to live out his gospel by _____

8. Jesus taught his followers by what he said and _____

9. According to *John* 13 what does Jesus call us? _____

10. As head of his body what does Jesus open for us? _____



Review Test Section 7

1. In *Acts* 1:11 Jesus was lifted up and returned to his Father. This is called his

2. Who asked the disciples "*Why are you standing there looking at the sky?*"

3. What did the first Christians think was going to happen soon? _____

4. As faithful Christians why must we be ready for the Lord's coming at anytime? _____

5. According to *1 Peter* 4:8-9 who is prowling around like a roaring lion? _____

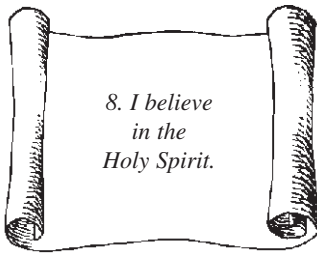
6. What will we be judged by? _____

7. God did not send Jesus among us to condemn us. ___ True ___ False (circle one)

8. What is the most important lesson of the last judgment? _____

9. List the *corporal* works of mercy: _____

10. List the *spiritual* works of mercy: _____

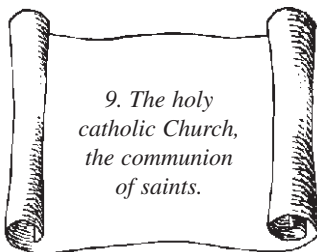


Review Test Section 8

After completing, all 3 test pages review and correct them with the study coordinator.
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1. The Hebrew word for *spirit* can be translated as _____ or _____
2. During the history of the Israelites the Spirit guided their lives through those who were called to be _____
3. The same _____ was present at the beginning of the world and at the beginning of Christ's life and work.
4. Jesus spoke often to his disciples about sending the Spirit. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
5. The Spirit guided and strengthened Christ's followers as they became the _____
6. Peter was the first in a long line of spiritual leaders called _____
7. It is important to realize that both _____ and _____ make up the Church.
8. Give 2 ways in which the Holy Spirit unites and guides us as the Church _____

9. Because Jesus gave us the Spirit we are called for _____
10. What one word sums up our close relationship with God? _____



Review Test Section 9

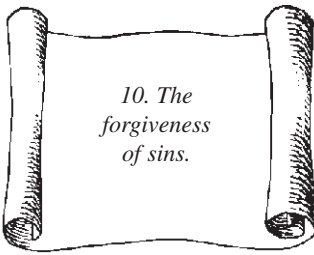
1. Membership in the Catholic Church only means gathering in a special building.
___ True ___ False (circle one)

2. Baptized members share a special bond. They are members of the _____

3. Jesus is so close to his followers that whatever is done to them is done to _____
4. After his conversion Paul often wrote to the early Christian converts about what special unity?

5. Not all Christians have a part to play in the life and health of Christ's community. ___ True ___ False (circle one)
6. As baptized members of Christ's body we are _____, _____, and _____
7. List the *four special signs* the Church has as the one Christ founded: _____
8. *Apostolic* means the church is _____
9. What are the 3 ways the sacraments help us? _____

10. Those who are joined to Christ by baptism form a union of both living and dead called _____

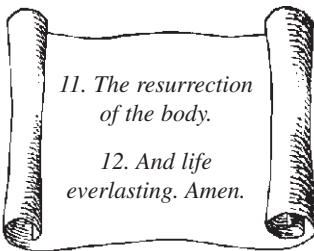


Review Test Section 10

1. Because baptism takes away our sins this means we will never sin again.
True False (circle one)
2. Temptations are the same as sins. True False (circle one)
3. Give 2 reasons why forgiveness does not come cheaply: _____ and _____
4. What do we see in Jesus crucified and raised up? _____
5. We can cling to this life-giving truth: _____ (finish the sentence)
6. The Bible does not teach that we must confess our sins. True False (circle one)
7. Who is a famous Old Testament example of someone who confessed their sin? _____
8. What New Testament letter says: “*confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed?*”

9. Through which sacrament does the Church fulfill Christ’s words: “*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven?*”

10. When the priest says the words “I absolve you from your sins” who does he represent? _____



Review Test Sections 11-12

1. As followers of Christ we believe that our bodies are: (finish the sentence)

2. In his plan to save us God sent a savior who took _____ like ours.
(fill in the word)
3. Why did Jesus teach, suffer and die for the forgiveness of our sins through his *body*?

4. What we receive in the Eucharist is not only a reminder of what Christ did, it also is _____
5. Why will Christ return to raise our bodies? _____
6. As part of God’s plan our bodies have a beautiful purpose: _____
and _____
7. The risen body of Jesus was a different kind of body than the one he had before he died. True False (circle one)
8. When it is revealed what does John say we will be like? _____
9. *Amen* is a Hebrew word that means _____
10. What is the small but beautiful prayer that the last book of the Bible ends with in *Revelation 22:30*?

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