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## **Our Sunday Obligation**

In accordance with the Third Commandment, the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (2168-2195)** deems it our obligation to attend mass on Sunday – unless there is a serious excuse for missing (for example, illness, the care of child, etc). Deliberate failure to fulfill this obligation is to commit a grave sin. This, coupled with full knowledge and deliberate consent, constitutes mortal sin.

There are groups known as “*Sabbatarians*” who reject the idea of observing the Lord’s Day on Sunday. They claim that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment is very clear that the day of rest and observance is to be on Saturday. Saturday was the day for observing the commandment I the Mosaic Law. However, as Christians, we realize that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law.

For the Jews in the Old Testament, the Sabbath was the seventh day on which the Lord rested after the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth. In **Col. 2:16**, we read where St. Paul tells us, “*Let no one, then, pass judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a festival or new moon or sabbath.*” Furthermore, in the New Testament, we find that the Apostles and the early Christians worshipped and broke bread (celebrated the Mass) on the first day of the week, Sunday (**Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, Rev. 1:10**).

Sunday became our day for observing the Third Commandment because it symbolizes the new creation that was ushered in by Christ's Resurrection. For Christians it is the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord's Day.

## Catholic or Christian?

Have you ever heard a non-Catholic tell you, “*I’m Christian and you’re Catholic?*”

You might be told that since the term, “Christian” is in scripture and “Catholic” isn’t. This is usually presented as proof that the name “Catholic” came along centuries later, which is not the case. That’s like asking a man whether he is a man or a human. The plain fact is that Catholics were the very *first* Christians.

Believers were first called Christians in Antioch (**Acts 11:26**). It is interesting to note that the 1<sup>st</sup> century bishop of Antioch (St. Ignatius) referred to the “*Catholic Church*” in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* while on the way to his death by martyrdom just a few decades later. His use of the term makes it clear that the Church was being called the “Catholic Church” for some time. The word, “Catholic” is derived from the Greek word, *katholikos* or *kath olos*, which means, *universal* or *whole*. The Greek manuscripts of **Acts 9:31** speak of *ekklesia* (church) *kath olos* (catholic).

The writings of the Early Church Fathers illustrate that they had the very same beliefs that we Catholics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have, including: the Holy Eucharist, the Real Presence, Sunday worship, the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mother, Infant Baptism, Confession, Church Authority, etc.

Our “Bible-only” friends might also be reminded of the fact that simply because something isn’t explicitly mentioned in Scripture doesn’t mean that it is invalid. For instance, the word “**Trinity**” is not *explicitly* named in the Bible but it is *implicitly* taught and is an essential belief of the Christian faith. A list of the books that should be in the Bible is not in the Bible - for that matter, the word “**Bible**” isn’t in the Bible. It was the Catholic Church who coined these words and declared the canon of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (**John 16:12-15**). The Catholic Church was founded by Christ and grew under the leadership of the Apostles and their successors who were led to *all truth* under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (**John 16:12-15**). Our non-Catholic friends can only trace their respective denominations back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century or later.

Many non-Catholics make the claim the term “catholic church”, which was used in some early 2<sup>nd</sup> century documents like Ignatius of Antioch’s *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, is merely a description of the universal Church and not a title.

“*The Martyrdom of Polycarp*” is a document from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It contains a phrase which is *When finally he concluded his prayer, after remembering all who had at any time come his way – small folk and great folk, distinguished and undistinguished, and the whole Catholic Church throughout the world – the time for departure came. So they placed him on an ass, and brought him into the city on a great Sabbath.*

As we have *already* examined, the words, καθ ολης (*katah-holos*) is **GREEK** for “*according to the whole*” and “*universal*”.

This phrase in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* - which, by the way, is written in Greek would be horribly **redundant**, if not *comical* if it wasn’t referring to the Catholic Church as a **title**. It would go something like this:

*“... and the whole whole throughout Church throughout the world ...”*

It is *abundantly* clear that this document is using the term **Catholic Church** as a title and not a mere description or the wording would make **no** sense whatsoever.

Whereas, every single Protestant denomination was started by a fallible human being, the Catholic Church was built by Jesus, the son of God – **God himself**.

Are we Catholic - or Christian? We’re *both*.

## **Brethren of the Lord**

Non-Catholics sometimes ask why Catholics believe in the perpetual virginity of our Blessed Mother when the Scriptures clearly speak about the “*brothers of the Lord*” and mention them by name (*James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude*).

What they won't speak about is the fact that these so-called “brothers” were probably cousins or some other kinsfolk of Jesus because there was no term for the word “*cousin*” in the Aramaic language that our Lord spoke. In the Old Testament, there are many examples of this:

In **Gen. 14:14**, Lot is called Abraham's "brother", even though he was the son of Haran, Abraham's brother (**Gen. 11:26–28**).

In **Gen. 29:15**, Jacob is referred to as the "brother" of his uncle Laban.

Brothers Kish and Eleazar were the sons of Mahli. Kish had sons of his own, but Eleazar's daughters married their "**brethren**," the sons of Kish - who were actually their cousins (**1 Chr. 23:21–22**).

Other proof against the charge that our Blessed Mother had other children is in the account of the Crucifixion of Jesus. What do the Scriptures have to say about the women standing at the cross and their children?

**Matt. 27:56** says, "*among whom were Mary Magdalene, and **Mary the mother of James and Joseph**, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee*".

**Mark 15:40** states, "*There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and **Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses**, and Salome*".

Finally, **John 19:25** tells us, "*But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, **Mary the wife of Clopas**, and Mary Magdalene*".

A comparison of these accounts of the crucifixion shows the mother of James and Joseph (Joses) to be Mary, the wife of Clopas (also called, Alphaeus) – **not** Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is obviously a relative of the Blessed Mother. The Greek word for sister (**Adelphe**), which is used in these accounts, has a variety of uses including *sister, sister-in-law, cousin, aunt, kinswoman, friend, fellow citizen, neighbor*, etc.

It is also interesting to note that of the **344** times in the New Testament that the words **Adelphos**, **Adelphe** and all of their variations are used – only **12%** (40 times) refer to **actual** or **probable** uterine siblings. **14%** (47 times) **may** or **may not** refer to a family member. A whopping **74%** (256 times) of the instances refer to cases where it almost certainly does **NOT** refer to family siblings.

There is simply no verse in all of Scripture which states that Mary had other children but there is **substantial** evidence that the so-called “*brethren of the Lord*” were simply relatives and not uterine siblings.

## **Contraception**

It's interesting to note that virtually every Protestant denomination held the same position on contraception as the Catholic Church before **1930**. That was the year the Anglican Church parted with the rest of the Christian world at their **Lambeth Conference**, declaring that contraception was acceptable in some circumstances. Soon afterward, they caved in completely and in the years that followed, virtually every Protestant denomination also accepted this practice.

It should be noted that the current secular view of contraception was born of racism and intolerance. **Margaret Sanger**, the founder of **Planned Parenthood** and an avowed atheist, was the mother of the artificial birth control movement who embraced the *Eugenics* movement, a doctrine that some people (including the poor, physically challenged, ethnic minority groups) had no reproductive rights. It is from this movement that Sanger proliferated the practice of artificial birth control as a means of controlling the population of these groups.

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2370, 2399)** deems any practice that “*renders procreation impossible*” as intrinsically evil. Anything that places barriers or hurdles before God is intrinsically evil, not simply because it is an action that is devoid of faith - but because it is diametrically *opposed* to faith itself. Early Protestant leaders such as John Calvin and John Wesley also spoke out against this practice.

We must remember that God is the author of life. We must put our complete faith and trust in God, who knows our needs even before we do (*Matt. 6:8, Ephesians 3:20*). Children are gifts from God – *not* punishments, as some of our political leaders would have us believe.

## **Mortal Sin**

Have you ever wondered what constitutes a mortal sin? According to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (1857)**, “*for a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is **grave matter** and which is also committed with **full knowledge** and **deliberate consent**."*

*“**Mortal sin** destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him.*

***Venial sin** allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it” (1855).*

Whereas **venial** sin *damages* our relationship with God, **mortal** sin *severs* it. It takes us from being in a state of God’s grace to being **voluntarily cut off** from that grace. To die in this state is to suffer *eternal* separation from God. This is why St. John refers to it as “*deadly sin*” (**1 John 5:16**).

In order to remove the stain of mortal sins, a person must confess them to a priest. Jesus gave the Church the power to bind and loose – to forgive sin or to hold it bound (**Matt. 16:19, Matt. 18:18, John 20:22-23**). Confessing mortal sins is necessary *prior* to receiving our Lord in the Eucharist. To receive the Eucharist while in a state of mortal sin is to profane the Body and Blood of our Lord, which St. Paul strictly warns against in **1 Cor. 11:27-29**. In short, it compounds the mortal sin by

What constitutes grave sin? Direct violations of the **10 Commandments** which are contrary to the Church’s moral teachings or contrary to Scripture might include: murder, envy, abortion, artificial contraception, adultery, fornication, stealing, hatred, heresy, drunkenness, drug abuse, gossip, intentionally missing mass, and many others. Just as there are varying degrees of sin (*venial and mortal*), there are varying degrees of the seriousness of violations against the Commandments.

## **Call No Man Father**

Have you ever heard the charge from non-Catholics that it is an unbiblical practice for us to refer to our priests, “**Father**”? Doesn’t Jesus specifically warn against this practice in **Matt. 23:9**? What, then, are we to call the man who sired or raised us or the person who taught us in school?

Many people who make this charge do so by side-stepping the truth in an effort to discredit the Church. What many non-Catholics don’t mention is that Jesus is using hyperbole (*exaggeration*) to make a point and does so many times in Scripture. In the verse that precedes this (**Matt: 23:8**), Jesus tells us not to call people “Teachers”. Is Jesus telling us that we can’t call certain people "fathers" or “teachers” when they may actually be fathers or teachers? The answer is a resounding, “**No.**” He is telling us that no man is to be considered father *above* our Father in heaven and no person is to be considered teacher *above* our Teacher in heaven.

Jesus was speaking about the Scribes and Pharisees who exalted themselves before all: “*They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.'*” (**Matt 23:6-7**)

Consider the following passages:

St. Stephen refers to “*our father Abraham,*” (**Acts 7:2**).

St. Paul speaks of “*our father Isaac*” (**Romans 9:10**).

*For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel*” (**1 Cor. 4:14–15**).

*“For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle . . . a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth”* (**1 Tim. 2:7**).

*“For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher”* (**2 Tim. 1:11**).

*“God has appointed in the church first Apostles, second prophets, third teachers”* (**1 Cor. 12:28**).

Jesus **himself** refers to “*Your father Abraham*” (**John 8:56**).

There are but a few of many examples of these words in Scripture that prove the Catholic position. Our priests are our fathers and teachers in Christ and in no way attempt to usurp God’s authority.

## All have Sinned – including Mary?

When we speak of the sinlessness and Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother, we sometimes hear the charge that *nobody* is sinless. After all, we're told that **Romans 3:10, 23** explicitly states: "*There is no one righteous, not even one; For there is no distinction; all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.*" Is that so? How about babies or toddlers below the age of reason? What about those who are mentally challenged and may not have full use of their intellect and will? What about Jesus? St. Paul is speaking about those who trust in the Mosaic Law for their salvation.

In this passage, St. Paul is actually quoting **Psalm 14**, where it says, "*The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God. They are corrupt...there is none that does good.'*" Later in the same Psalm, we hear that "*God is present in the company of the 'righteous.'*"

St. Paul was using *inclusive* language. This would be similar to somebody saying that "*everybody in town*" came to the carnival last year. He is referring to the mass of mankind but God can and *does* make exceptions for anybody he wishes.

When the Angel Gabriel visited Mary, St. Luke - *under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* - used the Greek word, ***Kecharitomene***, to describe the angel's greeting of Mary. Gabriel didn't call her "Mary", but "***Kecharitomene***" (**Luke 1:28**), which is the perfect passive participle, indicating a completed action with permanent result. Thus it translates, "***completely, perfectly, enduringly endowed with grace.***"

In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was the vessel that carried symbols of the word of God. The Ark prefigured Mary, who was the Ark of the ***New Covenant*** and actually carried God in her womb. The first Ark was lined with pure gold and other pure materials and was blessed so as not to be defiled. It was not even to be touched for penalty of death. How much more pure and undefiled would Our Blessed Mother have to be to carry God incarnate within her?

In the Old Testament, Eve (a type of Mary) was created without sin. Mary is the New Eve and cannot be inferior to her Old Testament types because the New Creation in Christ begins with her.

The New Testament fulfillment is ***always*** more glorious than the Old Testament type.

## The Holy Eucharist

The Catholic Church has always taught that we receive Jesus in the Eucharist – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Surprisingly, some secular polls show that an alarming number of people who identify themselves as “**Catholic**” don’t actually believe this.

According to the Second Vatican Council, the Holy Eucharist is “*the source and summit of our faith.*” In the **Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:25-71)**, our Lord emphatically states that unless we eat his flesh and drink his Blood, we have **no life** within us. He goes on to say “*For my flesh is **true food**, and my blood is **true drink**.*” It is interesting to note that the usual Greek word used for human eating is “*phagon*”, however, this is not the word used in these passages. St. John uses the word, “*trogon*”, which means, *to munch or to gnaw* - like an animal. Jesus was again using hyperbole (*exaggeration*) as he often did to drive his point across so that the crowd would understand that he was not speaking metaphorically. He **meant** what he said.

Later, **John 6:66**, goes on to say, “*As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.*” This marks the **only** time in Scripture where Jesus’ disciples left him for doctrinal reasons. They simply couldn’t handle what Jesus was telling them.

The Early Church Fathers were unanimous in their belief in the Holy Eucharist – so much so that they were willing to shed their blood by martyrdom for this belief. The Jewish and Roman leaders of the time accused them of **cannibalism** for their belief in the Eucharist and many of them suffered horrible deaths because of it.

The rejection of this truth is only as old as the Protestant Reformation, although some Protestant denominations believe in the Real Presence. For example, whereas Martin Luther believed in the Real Presence - John Calvin rejected it. Belief in the Eucharist was yet another source for the seemingly endless splintering of Protestantism. We must ask ourselves, “*Do I believe in the words of Jesus or do fallible human beings know better?*”

## Confession

As you probably know, Confession and an act of perfect contrition are required to remove the stain of mortal sin, which St. John calls, “*deadly sin*” (**1 John 5:16**). This is necessary before receiving Holy Communion at mass. It is also necessary for restoring our relationship with God after having committed mortal sin.

Jesus gave the Apostles (the first Bishops of the Church) the authority to forgive sins or to hold them bound (**Matt, 16:19, 18:18**). In **John 20:21-23**, Jesus appeared to the Apostles on the evening the first Easter. He told them, “*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” And when he had said this, **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.”**

This is very significant because, in all of Scripture, there are only *two* places where God breathes on man. The first is when he breathed life into Adam (**Gen 2:7**). The second place is here in John’s Gospel, where he gives the Church the power to forgive sins or hold them bound.

St. Paul speaks of the sacrament of confessing our sins to the Church: “*And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (**2 Cor. 5:18-20**).*

He further explains in **2 Cor. 2:10**, “*Whomever you forgive anything, so do I. For indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for you in the presence of Christ.*”

The Greek word St. Paul uses here for “**presence**” is *Prosopon* - which means **Person**. In Latin, this translates to **in persona Christi** – “*in the Person of Christ*”. He is telling the Corinthians that he forgave sins in the Person of Christ – just as all Catholic priests have the authority to do.

The 1<sup>st</sup> century document, the **Didache** (*the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*), emphatically states the necessity of confessing our sins to the Church: “*Confess your sins in Church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . . , On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, **after** confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure” (**Didache 4:14,14:1 [A.D.70]**).*

Finally, in **1 Cor. 11:27-29**, St. Paul warns us: “*Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord **unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.**” A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, **eats and drinks judgment on himself.**”*

As Catholics, we must examine ourselves to ensure that we have not separated ourselves from God’s grace by the refusal to confess our sins to the Church. We must also make certain that we are not guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Once Saved Always Saved?**

Not according to the Scriptures. As a matter of fact, according to the Bible, just the *opposite* is true. There are those who believe that once we accept Jesus, there is nothing we can do to lose our faith – our guarantee, yet Jesus himself says differently. However, we are told in **Rev. 3:5** that those who remain faithful will not have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. You cannot blot out what was never there. The idea that we cannot lose our faith and our salvation is one that fraught with a spiritual arrogance that the Bible clearly speaks against.

The false doctrine of Eternal Security (*Once Saved, Always Saved*) is based on verses like:

**John 10:28** - “*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.*”

However, the Bible tells us that although nobody can pluck us out of God’s hand – we can choose to defy God by rejecting **His** will and following our *own* will (**2 Peter 3:17, 1 Tim. 4:1, Rev. 22:19**).

When read in context, the Scriptures teach us that we have a *moral assurance* - a *moral certitude* of heaven – **if** we do God’s will and endure to the end. In **Matt. 7:21**, Jesus tells us, “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.*” Later, in that same Gospel (**Matt. 24:13**), Jesus reminds us that “**He who endures to the end will be saved**”

There are many places in Scripture where we are admonished to continue to do the will of God and persevere, otherwise, we will lose our salvation (**2 Chron. 15:2, Matt. 10:22, 1 Cor. 9:27, 10:12, Heb. 10:26-29, 1 Tim. 4:16, 2 Tim. 2:12, 2 Pet. 2:20-21, 1 John 5:13**).

In **2 Tim. 4:7**, St. Paul likens this journey to a race when he says, “*I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.*” He tells us in **Rom. 8:24-25**: “*To hope is the way we are saved. But if we saw what we hoped for, there would no longer be hope: how can you hope for what is already seen?*”

In the Parable of the Sower, we see that not all of the seed that fell on the ground grew and yielded fruit - **only** the seed that fell on the rich soil which are those who remain faithful in the Church (**Mark 4:1-20, Matt. 13:1-23, Luke 8:1-15**). These are the faithful who endure to the end.

We must remember that the Bible is not filled with absolute guarantees for those who believe – it is filled with God’s wonderful promises for those who remain *faithful*.

## **What is Salvation?**

The Bible says: I am **ALREADY SAVED** - This is **Initial Salvation** – God give us the initial grace to believe and be baptized.

**1 Pet. 3:21** – *This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

**Rom. 5:1-2** - *Therefore, since **we have been justified** by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access (by faith) to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God.*

**Rom. 8:24-25** - *For in hope **we were saved**. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? 25But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.*

**Eph. 2:5–8** - *even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ (**by grace you have been saved**), braised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, 7that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For by grace **you have been saved** through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God.*

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The Bible says: I am **BEING SAVED** - This is **Ongoing Sanctification** – God is sanctifying us throughout our life as we **cooperate** with his grace.

**1 Cor. 1:8** – *He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**2 Cor. 2:15** - *For we are the aroma of Christ for God among **those who are being saved** and among those who are perishing,*

**2 Cor. 7:1** - *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.*

**Phil. 2:12** - *So then, my beloved, obedient as you have always been, not only when I am present but all the more now when I am absent, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling**.*

**Heb 12:14** - *Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

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The Bible says: I **WILL BE SAVED** - This is **Final Sanctification/Salvation** – We die and go to heaven having endured to the end.

**Matt. 24:13** - *But the one who perseveres to the end **will be saved**.*

**Rom. 5:9–10** - *How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, **will we be saved** through him from the wrath. Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, **will we be saved** by his life.*

**1 Cor. 3:12–15** - *If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire [itself] will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person **will be saved**, but only as through fire.*

## Sola Fide

The Protestant Reformation was born of 2 major beliefs: **Sola Scriptura** (Scripture Alone) and **Sola Fide** (Faith Alone). **Sola fide** is the belief that we are saved by faith alone – apart from anything else. The only place in *all* of scripture where the words “*faith alone*” are found is in **James 2:24** where it says we are not saved by faith alone.

You may have been told that all you have to do is to “*believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*” in order to be saved. Or that if “*you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior*”, your eternity is secure.

On the contrary, simply believing is not enough. We must be obedient and do what the Lord wills. In the St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans (**Rom. 1:5, 16:26**), he speaks of the “obedience of faith” and “faith working through love” (**Gal. 5:6**). He also says that love is greater than faith or hope (**1 Cor. 13:13**). It is the **greatest** of all virtues. **James 2:14-26** speaks of the necessity of works and that “*faith without works is dead.*” In **Mark 1:24**, a demon cried out to Jesus, “*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? We know who you are--the Holy One of God!*”

**James 2:19** tells us, “*You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble.* If “*even the demons believe*” – how do we differentiate ourselves from them? We remain **obedient** to the will of God, and not our *own* will. In **Matt. 31-46**, Jesus said that the reward of his faithful ones were rewarded with eternal joy in heaven. Those who didn’t were banished to eternal suffering.

What does “*believing*” in our Lord Jesus entail?

- Being **baptized** (**Matt. 28:19-20, John 3:5, Rom. 2:29, Rom. 6:1-11, Col. 2:12-17, 1 Peter 3:21**)
- Picking up our **cross daily** to follow him (**Matt. 16:24, Luke 9:23**)
- **Works** of mercy and charity (**Matt. 19:21, 25:31–46, Luke 18:22**)
- **Obedying** his commandments (**John 15:10**)
- **Doing** the will of the Father (**Matt. 7:21, James 1:22**)
- We must **suffer** with Christ (**Matt. 10:38, 16:24, Mark 8:34, John 12:24, Rom. 8:17, 2 Cor. 1:5-7, Eph. 3:13, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 1:8, 1 Peter 2:19-21, 4:1-2**)

Are we doing what the Lord wills of his faithful? Or are we secure in the false notion that all we have to do is *believe*?

## Sola Scriptura

The second pillar of the Protestant Reformation is the doctrine of **Sola Scriptura** (Scripture alone). Adherents to this doctrine believe that the **Bible alone** is our sole authority – the final court of arbitration. The problem is that the Bible itself rejects this notion. **Nowhere** in all of Scripture does it say that Scripture alone is the final authority. However, Scripture tells us that the **Church** is the final authority.

In **Matt. 16:18-19**, Jesus tells St. Peter that the gates of hell wouldn't prevail against his Church and that he was giving him (Peter) the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Later, in **Matt. 18:15-18**, he tells the Apostles that the Church was to decide all matters that couldn't be resolved. He gave the **Church** the authority to make the final decision and judgment. In these passages, along with **John 20:21-23**, Jesus gives them the power to bind and loose.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told the Apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them to **all** truth – that he would take from what was **his** (Jesus) and declare it to **them** - the Church (**Acts 16:12-15**). The main verse that non-Catholics use to support Sola Scriptura is **2 Tim. 3:16**, where it says that “*All scripture is inspired by God and is **useful** for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness*”. Notice that it says scripture is “useful” – it doesn't say that it is “sufficient”.

The Scriptures are the written word of God but do not encompass **all** of the word of God. For example, we are told in **John 20:30-31**, “*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples **that are not written in this book.***” And again in **John 21:25**, “*There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.*”

Finally, St. Paul tells us that sacred tradition (**written and oral**) is also binding and authoritative (**2 Thes 2:15, 1 Cor 11:2, 2 Tim 2:2, 1 Thes 2:13**).

We must remember that the Bible was born from the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – **not** the Church from the Bible

## Old Testament Canon

Have you ever wondered why the Catholic Bible has 7 more books than non-Catholic Bibles? This collection, called the *Deuterocanonical* books (or 2<sup>nd</sup> Canon), includes **Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch** and **1 & 2 Maccabees**, as well as portions of **Esther** and **Daniel**.

Not long after the destruction of Jerusalem (circa 70 A.D.), a group of Rabbis asked permission from the Roman authorities to hold a council at **Jabneh (or Jamnia)**. One of the things discussed was use of the Greek translation of the Old Testament (*the Septuagint*) by early Christians. The name, "*Septuagint*", is derived from the number of scholars (70) who translated the Hebrew texts into Greek.

At this gathering, they decided to throw out 7 books (and portions of **Esther** and **Daniel**) that they felt were uninspired. They provided a new Greek translation because the early Christians were converting the Jews using the Septuagint, which was compiled some 200 years before the birth of Christ. It can be clearly illustrated that Jesus himself studied and quoted from these books.

The fact is that many passages in the New Testament are directly correlated to these 7 books from the Septuagint. Some examples include: **Matt. 27:42/Wis. 2:18-20, Luke 24:4/2 Macc. 3:26, John 10:22/1Macc 4:36 & 52-59, Rom. 11:33/Judith 8:14, 1 Cor. 10:20/4:7** and **1 Pet. 1:6-7/Wis. 3:5-6**.

According to historical sources, the rabbinical gathering at Jabneh was not even an "official" council with binding authority to make such a decision.

The Church doesn't hold to this post-Christ, post-temple canon because the mantle of authority under the New Covenant had been passed from Judaism to Christianity. The old wine and wineskin (Judaism) was now replaced by new wine (the Gospel) and new wineskins (the Church).

## Infant Baptism

Have you ever been asked, “*Why does the Catholic Church baptize infants?*”  
The simple answer is that God calls *all* to baptism.

Circumcision in the Old Testament prefigured baptism. St. Paul uses the terms, “*circumcision of the heart*” and the “*circumcision of Christ*” (**Romans 2:29, Col. 2:12-17**) to describe the reality of circumcision being a spiritually inward act, not merely an outward sign. The Old Testament type that *was* circumcision is *now* baptism.

Baptism was foretold in the Old Testament. **Ezekiel 36:25** states, “*I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.*” When Nicodemus asked Jesus how a person is born again, he replied, “*Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.*” (**John 3:5**).

This is echoed by St. Peter in **1 Peter 3:21**: “*Baptism . . . now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*”  
The Early Church baptized entire households, including children and servants – *without exception* (**Acts 10:1-49, 11:13-14 Acts 16:23-24, 1 Cor. 1:16**).

In **Acts 2:38-39**, St. Peter told the crowd, “*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call.*” The promise of salvation is not one that is made only to men and women but to those of ALL ages. Excluding infants from Baptism is forbid them from entering the Body of Christ, which is the antithesis of what Christ himself taught (**Matt 19:14, Luke 18:16**).

Just as with the Old Covenant and circumcision, the faith of the parents/guardians will guide the baptized child in the faith with the help of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant.

## Praying to Mary & the Saints

As a Catholic, you may have heard the charge that praying to our Blessed Mother and the saints is wrong because prayer is reserved for God alone. As Catholics, we know that we offer prayers of adoration or confession to God alone. However, the kind of prayers that we ask of the saints are requests for help – for their prayers to God on our behalf.

The scripture passage often used by non-Catholics is **1 Timothy 2:5**, which says, "*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...*" Another reference is the prohibition of conjuring up the dead for purposes of gleaning information from them (**Deut. 18:10-15**). The problem, as always, is the failure to understand the Scriptures in their proper context.

First of all, Jesus *is* our only mediator because only *his* blood is the perfect sacrifice before the Father for our sins. However, we are **all** called upon to be intercessors (**James 5:16, 1 John 5:16**). A common charge against praying to the saints for intercession is that they are dead and cannot hear us. This is a denial of **1 Cor. 12:12-27**, which tells us that we are all parts of the Body of Christ. In **Mark 12:28** and **Luke 20:38**, Jesus tells his critics that "*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*"

In God – **ALL** are alive. In **Hebrews 12:1**, St. Paul tells us that "*we are surrounded by so a great cloud of witnesses.*" The Transfiguration of Jesus is proof that the "dead" are indeed alive (**Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36**).

Secondly, we Catholics are *not* trying to get information from our brothers and sisters in Heaven. We are simply asking for their prayers.

If we are indeed all parts of the Body of Christ, then asking a saint in Heaven to pray for us is the *same* as asking a person here on earth to do the same. In fact, the **only** difference is that those in Heaven have been made perfect and righteous because nothing unclean can enter Heaven (**Rev. 21:27**). "*The fervent prayer of a righteous man is very powerful*" (**James 5:16**). Although, we on earth have not yet been made perfect, we are called upon to intercede for each other.

## The Pro-Choice Lie

Everybody likes to have choices in life, whether they are financial, personal or business-related. Having a choice is a **good** thing – and this is *precisely* what the pro-death faction plays upon when promoting their agenda of death. The one thing you'll never hear from them is exactly what **“choice”** means. **Choice** means having to make the decision as to whether you will put your child to death - or to accept that gift from God and choosing to let the child live.

Abstinence, chastity and adoption are valid choices that *never* seem to be promulgated by organizations such as *Planned Parenthood*, whose founder, **Margaret Sanger** was not only an avowed atheist, but also an avid believer that certain people like the poor, physically challenged or ethnic minority groups had **no** reproductive rights. Over the years her ideas have morphed into slick, non-offensive slogans such as **“Reproductive Rights”** or **“Clean and Safe Abortion”**. There is *nothing* clean or safe for the child who is murdered by people who had **no** right to kill him or her.

Unfortunately, in this culture of death, you will find more sympathy from the mainstream media for rescuing cats and dogs than unborn children - who are *really* the most defenseless members of society. Abortion is an abomination before God because it is a wanton act of murder against a defenseless, innocent victim as well as a refusal of his gift of love.

According to the World Health Organization, the annual worldwide number of abortions is somewhere between 35-50 million. This is almost the same number of people who were killed during WWII – and *that* was at a time when the entire **world** was killing each other.

These numbers indicate an unprecedented genocide that dwarfs the numbers of victims who were butchered at the hands of Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung and every other mass-murderer in the history of the world – against victims who *never* had a chance – **OR** a choice.

## **Scripture & Oral Tradition**

Have you ever been told that Scripture is more binding than Tradition? Most non-Catholics are under the misconception that Catholics put too much stock in Tradition and that Tradition is not binding as the written word. They point to the “*human precepts*” and “*traditions of men*” that Jesus warned against (**Matt. 15:9, Mark 7:5-9**). They couldn’t be *more* wrong. Jesus was speaking of the Pharisees and scribes who were living hypocritical lives and placing their traditions above the word of God and the spirit of the Law.

Whereas, we know that the Scriptures are the *written* word of God, they do not explicitly encompass all of God’s truth. This is the false doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, which is not even supported by Scripture itself. In fact, the Bible explicitly teach the Catholic Church's position that the Word of God is contained in both Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

St. Paul tells us that we are to *hold fast* to the traditions taught by the Apostles – either by an “*oral statement or written letter*” (**2 Thess. 2:15, 2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Cor. 11:2**). He goes on to say in **1 Tim. 3:15**, that the Church is the “*pillar and foundation of truth*.” He doesn’t say that the *bible* is the pillar and foundation of truth because it hadn’t been compiled yet and much of it hadn’t yet been written.

In one of the many passages where Jesus relayed his authority to the Apostles, he promised them that there were many things they needed to know but could not hear at that time. He also promised them that the Holy Spirit would guide his Church to ALL truth about the things that were coming (**John 16:13-15**).

As we have seen, the importance of Sacred or Apostolic Tradition – *even when compared to the Scriptures* - is confirmed by the Scriptures themselves. There are traditions, however, that may be disciplinary and others that are cultural and not necessarily binding to the faith. Some of these might include wearing head-coverings during mass, feast days, advent wreaths, or other customs.

## **Communion of Saints**

The Communion of Saints is the doctrine that speaks to the *unity* of the Body of Christ.

In **1 Cor. 12:18-20, 24-26**, St. Paul explains that though we are many individual parts, we make up *one* Body – that is, the Body of Christ. In **John 17**, our Lord Jesus prayed at the Last Supper for the unity of this Body (which is the Church), comparing it to the unity of the Father and the Son. The truth of this doctrine is that we are more radically joined together in Christ than the finger is to the hand.

The Church is comprised of 3 parts: The **Church Militant** (those on earth), the **Church Suffering** (those in Purgatory) and the **Church Triumphant** (those in Heaven). *None* of these parts is more important than the other. This is why we not only ask each other on earth for prayers, but of those in Heaven as well because we are all part of the same Body. Non-Catholics who believe that those who have passed from this world are simply “*dead and cannot hear us*” deny the very Scriptures they claim to be the truth. **Hebrews 12:1** tells us that we should “*rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us*” because we are “**surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses**”.

Because we are the Family of God – we are entreated in Scripture to pray for one another. Since we are all parts of the ONE Body of Christ, asking for those in heaven to pray for us, just as we ask those on earth, is efficacious. Those in heaven have been made perfect in Christ and the prayer of a righteous person is indeed very powerful (**James 5:16**). There are numerous New Testament passages that speak about interceding for one another. **1 Cor. 12:21-22** emphatically says that, “*The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I do not need you.’*” This passage speaks to the importance of all of the parts of the Body.

**Revelation 5:8** shows the Elders in heaven bringing our prayers before God and **Rev. 8:3-4** speaks of the Angels in heaven doing the same thing.

The doctrine of the Communion of Saints is also supported by the Early Church Fathers from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to St. Augustine and beyond. In fact, this belief was so ingrained in the Early Church that it was included in many of the creeds, including the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed which we recite each week at mass.

## **The Early Church Fathers on . . .**

It is important for Catholics to know the writings of the **Early Church Fathers**, who were the great Christians of the early Church after the Apostolic era and who carried on the oral and written Traditions of the Catholic Church. In their writings, we find the rich trust that St. Paul spoke of in **2 Tim. 1:14**, which is the deposit of faith.

In the coming weeks and months, we will discuss their writings as they pertain to a multitude of Catholic Doctrines. For example, the truth of the Catholic Church is proclaimed by the Fathers in the following writings:

**St. Ignatius of Antioch** - Follow your bishop, every one of you, **as obediently as Jesus Christ followed the Father**. Obey your clergy too ***as you would the Apostles***; give your deacons the same reverence that you would to a command of God. Make sure that no step affecting the Church is ever taken by anyone without the bishop's sanction. **The sole Eucharist you should consider valid is one that is celebrated by the bishop himself, or by some person authorized by him. Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as, wherever Jesus Christ is present, there is the Catholic Church** (*Letter to the Smyrneans* 8:2 [A.D. 110]).

**St. Irenaeus** - For even creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him who made it, and the world manifests Him who ordered it. ***The Universal [Catholic] Church, moreover, through the whole world, has received this tradition from the Apostles*** (*Against Heresies* 2:9 [A.D. 189]). True knowledge is the doctrine of the Apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, ***and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved, without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither addition nor curtailment ...*** (*ibid.* 4:33 [A.D. 189]).

**St. Augustine** - "For my part, **I should not believe the gospel except moved by the authority of the Catholic Church**. (*Against Ep. Manichaeus* 5:6)

## **ECFs on The Intercession of the Saints. . .**

As we continue our study of the **Early Church Fathers (ECFs)**, we see that asking for intercession of the saints was practiced from the earliest years of the Church:

### **St. Cyprian**

Let us remember one another in concord and unanimity. Let us on both sides always pray for one another. Let us relieve burdens and afflictions by mutual love, that if one of us, by the swiftness of divine condescension, shall go hence the first, **our love may continue in the presence of the Lord, and our prayers for our brethren and sisters not cease in the presence of the Father's mercy** (*Letters* 56[60]:5 [A.D. 252]).

### **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

Then [during the Eucharistic prayer] we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, Apostles, and martyrs, that **through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition...** (*Catechetical Lectures* 23:9 [A.D. 350]).

### **Liturgy of St. Basil**

By the command of your only-begotten Son we communicate with the memory of your **saints . . . by whose prayers and supplications have mercy upon us all, and deliver us for the sake of your holy name** (*Liturgy of St. Basil* [A.D. 373]).

### **St. John Chrysostom**

He that wears the purple . . . **stands begging of the saints to be his patrons with God, and he that wears a diadem begs the tent-maker [Paul] and the fisherman [Peter] as patrons, even though they be dead**" (*Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 26 [A.D. 392]).

When you perceive that God is chastening you, fly not to his enemies . . . **but to his friends, the martyrs, the saints, and those who were pleasing to him, and who have great power** [in God] (*Orations* 8:6 [A.D. 396]).

### **St. Augustine**

A Christian people celebrate together in religious solemnity the memorials of the martyrs, both to encourage their being imitated and **so that it can share in their merits and be aided by their prayers** (*Against Faustus the Manichean* [A.D. 400]).

## **Images and Relics**

The anti-Catholic charge that Catholics are *idolaters* is a false accusation. Catholics see images and relics as *worship aids* – **not** as idols. It is similar to looking at a photo of a loved one that reminds you of that person. God's prohibition on the Hebrews against idols was **not** the creation of statues or images in and of themselves. It was against the **worship** of these idols as *gods*.

### **Ex. 20:2-6**

*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;*

***Do not have any other gods before me.***

*You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

The Israelites had just come out of Egypt where they had been in bondage for over 400 years and had picked up some of the bad ways of the Egyptians. Even while Moses was on the mountain receiving the commandments, the people below made a golden calf, which greatly angered God.

Non-Catholics must remember that God **commanded** Moses to make 2 golden Cherubim to place atop the Ark (**Exod. 25:18-20**) and they prostrated themselves before it (**Joshua 7:6**). He also commanded him to fashion a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole so that those who gazed upon it would be healed (**Num. 21:4-9**). They didn't **worship** these images, they did as God commanded.

The Protestant position against images would render **all** statues and paintings created by Catholic **and** Protestant artists over the centuries **idolatrous**. It is simply not a cohesive argument, given the **context** of Scripture.

## Mary, the New Eve

The Catholic Church teaches that as Jesus is the New Adam (**Rom. 5:12-17, 1 Cor. 15:22, 45**), Mary is the New Eve (**Gen. 3:15, Rev. 12:1**).

Just as Eve was named **Woman** because she became “*the mother of all the living*” (**Gen 3:20**), Mary becomes “*the mother of all living in Christ*” (**John 2:4, 19:26**). Jesus’ words from the cross in John’s Gospel, “*woman behold thy son*” and “*behold thy mother*”, can certainly be interpreted in this way. If Jesus spoke these words only to tie up loose ends and make sure that his mother was cared for, they make no sense in the light of the fact that He had plenty of time to make those provisions for her. He knew far ahead of time He was to die and he was giving his mother, the *Woman*, the *New Eve* to us.

**Rom. 5:12-17** tells us that as sin entered the world through one man and that through one man, **Jesus Christ**, we are acquitted. Adam is an Old Testament type of Jesus, and Eve is a type of Mary.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus never refers to his mother as “*mother*” (**John 2:4, 19:26**). Whenever he addresses his mother, he calls her “*Woman*”. The non-Catholic will point to this as proof that there was not much that was special about Mary or that Jesus didn’t hold her in very high regard. This couldn’t be further from the truth. He is giving her honor by paying her the highest compliment. This correlates directly to the **Woman** in **Gen. 3:15**, whose offspring would crush the serpent’s head and in **Rev. 12**, the Woman “clothed with the Sun, whose son *is destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod.*”

Jesus defeated death on Calvary (*Skull place*) and fulfilled the prophecy in **Gen. 3:15** about the offspring of the Woman. While Mary was present at the foot of the cross as this was happening, what did Jesus call her in **John 19:26**? He called her “**WOMAN**”, because the prophecy about the head of the serpent being crushed in **Genesis** was taking place right there on Calvary.

### **SIDE NOTE: Our Lady of Guadalupe**

The name in the Aztec dialect (*Nahuatl*) was “*Coatlaxopeuh*”, pronounced “*Quatlasupe*”. The name was corrupted by the Spanish to “*Guadalupe*”. Coatlxopeuh, means “*crushed serpent.*” Ironically, in the Aztec religion the highest idol and creator of mankind is Quetzalcóatl, which means “*Feather-Serpent.*”

So Our Lady of Guadalupe is “**Our Lady of the crushed serpent**”, which is exactly what we read about her in **Gen. 3:15**:

*“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

## Purgatory

The doctrine of Purgatory is one of the most misunderstood teachings of the Catholic faith.

First of all, Purgatory isn't necessarily a place, but a state. According to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, it's a "*final purification of the elect*" (1030-1032). Another misconception is that Purgatory is a "*second chance*". This is not the case, as those Christians who die in a state of **mortal sin** are not eligible because mortal sin severs our relationship with God.

Since **Revelation 21:27** tells us that *nothing* unclean can enter heaven, a final purification or *purgation* is necessary for some before entering heaven. Those in Purgatory will indeed make it into heaven. As the great Protestant author, C.S. Lewis once stated, "*The mercy of God demands purgatory.*"

Regardless of what some may say, the belief in Purgatory *is* scripturally-based. In **2 Macc. 42-46**, we see that Judas Maccabeus prays for the men of his army, killed in battle. Verse **44** says, "*... for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death.*" **Matt. 5:25-26** tells us that unless we have settled our matters, we will be "*handed over to the prison guard and will not be released until we have paid the last penny.*"

We are told in **1 Cor. 3:12-15** that the day (*judgment*) will disclose the foundation that a person builds upon and how it will be revealed: "*If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.*"

It's interesting how God is described in the Old Testament. There are **many** verses that describe God handing out his justice as a **Refiner**. A refiner is someone who takes the raw material for metal and actually gets the gold and silver and iron from that material - and he does it with **FIRE**. We see in **Malachi 3:3, Jeremiah 6:27-30, Ezekiel 22:18, Psalm 119:119, Psalm 37:20, Zech. 13:9, Isa 48:10**, where God is the **Refiner** who burns away the impurities to get to the precious metal

Additionally, **Matt. 12:32** states, "*whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come*", which indicates that there *is* purification *after* death for some. **Matt. 18:32-35** and **Luke 12:58-59** are additional verses that support this doctrine.

All of these verses point to the fact that those in Purgatory will suffer loss but will eventually be *released* (*purified, purged from iniquity, saved*). Purgatory is for the believer who dies in God's favor (*without* the stain of mortal sin) but is in need of final purification *before* entering heaven.

## Authority of the Church

Catholics and non-Catholics alike cannot understand the teachings of the Church until they first understand the **Authority** given her by our Lord Jesus. This is because some Biblical teachings are *explicit*, while others are *implicit*. It was the Church who defined doctrines like the Holy Trinity and declared the canon of Scripture – *not* the Bible.

Jesus told the Apostles that the Church would have the **final** say on matters concerning the Body (**Matt. 18:15-18**), that even the gates of hell wouldn't prevail against his Church (**Matt. 16:18**), and gave them the power to retain and forgive sins (**Matt. 16:19, 18:18, John 20:23**). He also assured the Apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church to **ALL** truth about the what was to come and that the Holy Spirit would take from what was Jesus' and declare it to the **Church** (**John 16:13-15**). He never said "*some truth*" or "*only up until the Reformation*" He said, "**ALL** truth."

In **1 Tim. 3:15**, St. Paul asserts that the Church is the "*pillar and foundation of truth*". The Great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine once said: "*For my part, I should not believe the gospel except moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.*"

It's also interesting to note that Jesus equates his *very self* with his Church, which is his Body (**Acts 9:4-5**): *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.*

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "*Why are you persecuting the Church?*," which is exactly what Saul (St. Paul) was doing. Jesus chose to equate **himself** with his Church – his Body.

**Acts 15:28-29** is further proof that this Authority rests on the Church. The early Church didn't appeal solely to Scripture when making doctrinal decisions at the Council of Jerusalem:

*'It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell.'*

## **Abortion**

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jeremiah 1:5).*

**Abortion** is the murder of an innocent, helpless pre-born human being. This procedure is usually carried out in the name of convenience, even though pro-abortion groups claim that it is *necessary*, especially in cases of rape or incest. The truth is that, in these cases, the numbers barely amount to a fraction of *one percent*.

Every year at Christmastime, people are horrified and saddened when they read of the edict decreed by Herod that all boys in and around Bethlehem up to the age of 2 years should be killed (**Matt. 2:16**). Historians have surmised that this affected anywhere between **100-200** children and some say less. In the United States alone, that number is dwarfed every *1½ hours* at the hands of abortion doctors. Worldwide, that number will be surpassed *before* you finish reading this article.

Statistically, in America, the most dangerous place for a baby is in the mother’s womb. The unborn are truly the *most* helpless creatures in our society. Whereas it is wrong to neglect or abuse animals – *their* cause is championed by more groups and more laws than those of *human* babies.

The World Health Organization claims that the total annual number of abortions is somewhere between **35-50 million** worldwide, which is more than the *entire* population of the State of California. While there are some who bravely fight this atrocity on a regular basis through prayer and protest, the truth is that many of us do almost *nothing* to put an end this abomination. Some will tell you that they simply have *no time* to march in front of an abortion mill and yet others will vote for pro-abortion candidates, stating that they won’t vote based in a single issue – even though this the most *important* moral issue of our times.

If all American Catholics *alone* cast their votes based on God’s teachings, and not our own will or pride, we could put an end to legalized murder. When we do nothing, we violate the very word and will of God (**Isaiah 1:13-17, Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:36, John 15:17**). We will all have to give an account before God as to what we *did* - and what we *didn’t* do.

Our God is a God of justice, who hears the cry of innocent blood and will *not* tolerate it (**Psalms 106:35, 37-38, 2 Kings 17:17-18**). We must examine our conscience and our faith in God’s promises – *and warnings of his justice* - before we choose to sit back and do *nothing*.

## Apostolic Succession

**Apostolic Succession** is one of the **Four Marks** of the true Church that we pledge belief in when we recite the Nicene Creed every Sunday. For the Church to be Apostolic, it must be the one Church that was established by Jesus Christ 2000 years ago and the very same Church that the Apostles continued to build and grow during the 1<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

You might hear non-Catholics claim that before the **Reformation**, the Church was so corrupt and had so perverted Biblical teachings that it ceased to exist as the Body of Christ and therefore, had to be rebuilt or revived. They speak of the “*invisible Church*” having been around from the beginning that had its rebirth during the Reformation. This goes **completely** against the Word of God.

First of all – the idea of an invisible Church is **not** supported by Scripture. In **Matt. 5:14**, Jesus tells the Apostles that the Church was “*the light of the world*” and that, “*A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*” Furthermore, Jesus tells the Apostles that “*the gates of hell will not prevail against it*” (**Matt. 16:18**) despite what non-Catholics might claim. After the Reformation, many different “*denominations*” splintered off from the Church and continue to splinter today to the tune of about **35,000** divided, sects.

Another charge is that after the death of Apostles, there was to be no succession. This makes no sense, as God would never leave his Church an orphan (**John 14:18**) and in total chaos, teaching different doctrines from sect to sect. **Acts 1:16-26** tells us that the Apostles chose another to take the office of Judas, which was the fulfillment of the prophecy in **Psalms 109:8.**, which is actually quoted in **Acts 1:20** - ‘*Let his days be few; and let another take his office.*’ It is interesting to note that in the **Acts 1:20**, the Greek word for office is actually **Episkopay**, which means **Bishopric**.

In **Acts 15:15** we see that the Apostles told the people not to listen to anybody that **they** hadn’t mandated and sent out to them.

We have the writings of the Early Church Fathers who taught about Apostolic Succession from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century on – **while some of the Apostles were still alive**. One example is a letter from **St. Peter’s** successor, **Pope Clement I** in the year **A.D. 80**:

*"Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, **if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry**" (Letter to the Corinthians 42:4–5, 44:1–3 [A.D. 80]).*

## Wine or Grape Juice?

The Fundamentalist charge that Jesus drank non-alcoholic grape juice and *not* wine is one that simply cannot stand up to Biblical *or* scientific evidence. Many times we hear that *all* drinking is sinful and certain Biblical verses are furnished as proof for this claim, such as, **Prov. 23:20, Ephesians 5:18, I Tim. 3:8; Tit.2:3**. These verses speak to the sin of **drunkenness**, not of drinking in general.

First of all, the first miracle performed by our Lord recorded in the Bible is at the Wedding at Cana, when he turned water into wine at the request of his Mother. Let's examine what the Bible has to say about this miracle, as well as other references to wine and drinking:

**John 2:10** states, *"Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."* **Ps. 104:14-15** says, *"You bring bread from the earth, and wine to gladden our hearts, Oil to make our faces gleam, food to build our strength"*.

In **Luke 7:34**, Jesus says, *"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard'"* In **1 Tim. 5:23**, St. Paul tells timothy, *"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."* Whereas these verses do not condemn drinking in moderation, *neither* do they condone drunkenness.

The fact is that crushed grapes begin to ferment immediately the grapes are crushed. Interestingly, the chemical process that halts fermentation was only invented in the 1920's by the **Welch's Company**, in response to the law of Prohibition. This means that grape juice as a product has only been around for less than 100 years. Consequently, when wine is spoken of in Scripture – it is *truly* wine and *not* grape juice.

While the Scriptures do condemn drunkenness, drinking in moderation is not necessarily evil unless, of course, this is a source of sin for the individual, such as alcoholism, or losing one's inhibitions or self-control.

## Mary, The God-Bearer

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Patriarch of Constantinople, **Nestorius**, held that there were two persons in Christ. He held that Jesus was not divine, but merely human and that God only dwelt in Him as in a temple. This is what became known as the *Nestorian Heresy*.

It has been said that virtually every heresy begins with the misconception of the nature of God. This heresy was no different. To combat this heresy, the **Council of Ephesus** was convened in **431**. **St. Cyril**, who was the patriarch of Alexandria, charged Nestorius with heresy and appealed to **Pope Celestine I**, who agreed with him.

In order to convey the reality of Jesus' human and divine nature – the doctrine of the **Hypostatic Union** was declared. This doctrine states that Jesus is both fully God and fully man – and these two natures *cannot* be separated.

It was also at this Council that the Blessed Mother Mary was declared *Theotokos*, literally, *God-bearer*, because she gave birth to Jesus who was God incarnate.

The Nestorian heresy held that Mary was *Christotokos* (Mother of Christ), instead of *Theotokos* (Mother of God). As the Council clearly defined, Mary gave birth not simply to a human being but to a *divine person* who united to himself a human and divine nature.

For the Christian of today, to deny the doctrines of the Hypostatic Union and Theotokos is to fall back into the Nestorian heresy.

## **Mary: The Ark of the New Covenant**

Whereas the **symbols** of God's word were contained in the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament, Mary actually carried God himself - ***the Word*** - in her womb in the New Testament. And, whereas the Old Testament Ark had to be made of pure materials and blessed and undefiled, how much ***more*** pure and undefiled would the vessel that ***actually carried God*** have to be?

Non-Catholics say that Mary didn't have to be sinless to give birth to the Messiah - that Jesus could have been born from ***anybody***, even a harlot. Yes, Jesus ***could*** have been born of a harlot – but in order to fulfill all righteousness, his coming ***had*** to be more glorious than the Old Testament type. He chose Mary out of all of the women in history to be his mother.

**Without** exception, New Testament fulfillments of Old Testament Old Testament are always more perfect and glorious than the type itself: **Adam & Jesus, Moses & Jesus, Jonah & Jesus, Manna & Jesus (the Bread of Life), Eve & Mary, Ark of the Covenant & Mary, Joseph & Jesus, Melchizedek & Jesus.**

The following Scriptural comparisons show that the **Ark** was a type of **Mary**:

The Ark traveled to the house of Obed-Edom ***in the hill country of Judea*** (2 Sam 6:1-11), likewise, Mary traveled to the house of Elizabeth and Zachariah ***in the hill country of Judea*** (Lk 1:39)

David, dressed as a priest danced and ***leaped in front of the ark***. (2 Sam 6:14) similarly, John the Baptist (of priestly lineage) ***leaped in his mother's womb before Mary*** (Lk 1:41)

David asks, "***How can the ark of the Lord come to me?***" (2 Sam 6:9) whereas, Elizabeth asks "***Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?***" (Lk 1:43)

The ark remained in the house of Obed-Edom ***three months*** (2 Sam 6:11) likewise, Mary remained in the house of Elizabeth ***three months*** (Lk 1:56)

The ark contained the urn of manna, ***the bread from heaven*** similarly, Mary's womb carried Jesus, ***the Bread of Life***.

## **Matrimony**

At times we hear that Catholics should “*get off their high horse*” regarding marriage because we place too much importance on things that are not a matter of salvation. After all, people make mistakes.

When Jesus was teaching the crowds about marriage, he once again elevated it to the level of a Sacrament – just as God had done in **Genesis** between Adam and Eve. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “*by its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring, and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory*” (CCC 1652). Whereas others may see marriage as a mere romantic union or contract – a Catholic marriage is a *covenant*.

In **Malachi 2:16**, God says “*I hate divorce.*” This sounds rather harsh, but it emphasizes the fact that matrimony is ordained by God. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus, the **Bridegroom** and his Church, his **Bride**, are inseparable. Similarly, a husband and wife are inseparable because this was God’s divine plan from the beginning.

In **Matt 19:3-10**, the Pharisees, who were always looking for an opportunity to trick Jesus, asked him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause because of the Mosaic Law allowing it. Jesus answered, “*Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.*”

He went on to say, “*Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another *commits adultery*.*”

Unlike a civil divorce, which is the **dissolution** of a civil contract, a marriage in the eyes of God is **indissoluble**. Contrary to what some may think, an **annulment** is not a “*Catholic divorce*.” And, unlike a civil divorce, an annulment or **Declaration of Nullity**, is a decree stating that a sacramental marriage never took place. It is not the **ending** of a marriage but an acknowledgement that there was no Sacrament of Matrimony from the very beginning of the union.

## **ECFs on Purgatory. . .**

As we continue our study of the **Early Church Fathers (ECFs)**, we see that, regardless of what many non-Catholics believe, the Church has always taught about the reality of Purgatory:

### **Clement of Alexandria**

He (the believer) is tortured then still more, not yet attaining what he sees others have acquired. The greatest torments are assigned to the believer, for God's righteousness is good, and His goodness righteous, and though these punishments cease in the course of the expiation and purification of each one, "yet" etc. [A.D. 150-215]).

### **Origen**

If a man departs this life with lighter faults, he is condemned to fire which burns away the lighter materials, and prepares the soul for the kingdom of God, where nothing defiled may enter. [A.D. 185-232]).

### **Cyprian**

It is one thing, tortured by long suffering for sins, to be cleansed and long purged by fire; another to have purged all sins by suffering. It is one thing, in fine, to be in suspense till the sentence of God at the Day of Judgment; another to be at once crowned by the Lord. [A.D. 253]).

### **John Chrysostom**

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice [Job 1:5), why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them. [A.D. 392]).

### **Augustine**

That there should be some fire even after this life is not incredible, and it can be inquired into and either be discovered or left hidden whether some of the faithful may be saved, some more slowly and some more quickly in the greater or lesser degree in which they loved the good things that perish, through a certain purgatorial fire. [A.D. 421]).

## **ECFs on Mary's Perpetual Virginity. . .**

As we continue our study of the **Early Church Fathers (ECFs)**, we see that, regardless of what many non-Catholics believe, the Church has always taught that Mary had no other children besides Jesus:

**Hilary of Poitiers:** If they [the brethren of the Lord] had been Mary's sons... she would never have been given over in the moment of the passion [crucifixion] to the apostle John as his mother, the Lord saying to each, "Woman, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother" (John 19:26-27) [A.D. 354]).

**Athanasius:** Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence deny also that He took true human flesh from the ever-virgin Mary. [A.D. 360]).

**Epiphanius:** We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down and took flesh, that is, was born perfectly of the holy ever-virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. [A.D. 374]).

### **Jerome**

But as regards Victorinus, I assert what has already been proven from the gospel—that he [Victorinus] spoke of the brethren of the Lord not as being sons of Mary but brethren in the sense I have explained, that is to say, brethren in point of kinship, *not* by nature. [A.D. 383]).

*It's also interesting to note that the Protestant Reformers believed in Mary's perpetual virginity:*

**Luther:** "It is an article of faith that Mary is Mother of the Lord and still a virgin...Christ, we believe, came forth from a womb left perfectly intact."

**Calvin:** "There have been certain folks who wish to suggest from this passage (**Matt 1:25**) that the Virgin Mary had other children than the Son of God, and that Joseph had dwelt with her later; but what folly is this!"

**Zwingli:** "I firmly believe that Mary, according to the words of the gospel, as a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and in childbirth and after childbirth forever remained a pure, intact Virgin."

## **Christmas – A Time for Celebration**

As Christians, Christmas means far more than a national holiday with all of the traditional trimmings. Presents, decorations, a tree with lights and delectable treats are all wonderful but they are merely reminders of the most important birth in the history of the world – the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, **Jesus Christ**.

Christmas hasn't always been celebrated by all Christian sects throughout history. For the Puritans, it was a time of fasting and self-denial, for pondering their sins. The Calvinists in Scotland went even further by completely abolishing Christmas as a holiday. Some groups still adhere to these austere anti-celebratory practices. Some go so far as to say that Christmas is a pagan celebration of winter solstice and that Jesus was not even born in the winter, lending credence to their claim

Whereas, the precise date of the birth of Jesus is a mystery, memorializing this and other events of his sacred life, death and resurrection are *anything* but new. In the early centuries, pagan temples were replaced by cathedrals and churches. Pagan holidays were replaced by Christian remembrances of the saints and God, signaling a new time where paganism had been conquered by Christianity. The practice of worshipping false gods gave way to worshipping and giving thanks to the Almighty God.

In Luke's Gospel, when Mary visits her kinswoman Elizabeth, John the Baptist *leaped with joy* in his mother's womb (**Luke 1:41**), just as David danced and *leaped in front of the ark*. (**2 Sam. 6:14**). Even as an unborn child, John was moved by the Holy Spirit to celebrate the coming of the Christ – the Bread of Life.

Elizabeth then says to Mary, "*Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" (**Luke 1:43**), in the same way David inquired about the Ark of the Covenant, "*How can the ark of the Lord come to me?*" (**2 Sam. 6:9**). The ark contained the urn of manna, *the bread from heaven*, similarly, Mary's womb carried Jesus, *the Bread of Life*.

At Christmas, we celebrate our freedom from the captivity of sin through the incarnation of our Savior, Jesus Christ – the *Bread of Life!*

## Charity

Many things can be said of the virtue of Charity. The word itself conjures up thoughts of anything from the loving example of Mother Teresa to plunking a coin into the Salvation Army's black pot. Whereas, charitable acts include giving alms to the poor, visiting the sick and helping those less fortunate – it also includes treating others with the love, respect and dignity that God expects from us.

St. Paul tells us in **1 Cor. 13:13** about the three great virtues of **Faith, Hope and Love (charity)**. He goes on to say that the **greatest** of these is love. Are we truly charitable in all aspects of our life or do we understand charity as being simply a monetary donation? Do we conduct ourselves with others in a respectful manner – or do we indulge in gossip and harbor ill-will towards one another?

In **John 13:34**, Jesus tells us to love one another, ***"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."*** This was **not** a mere suggestion but a **command**. This same command is echoed in **Mark 12:30-31**. In this passage, Jesus tells us about our love for God **and** each other and goes so far as to say, ***"There is no other commandment greater than these."*** This is very strong language indeed.

Finally, in the **10 Commandments** the first three are dedicated to God alone – but the next **seven** pertain to how we treat others.

One area we might want to consider is in the way we conduct ourselves as we leave the church grounds after mass. As we drive away after mass – many times it seems that the charity and unity we all shared during the mass is all but gone. As we jockey for position to be among the **first** to leave the Church property, we often times forget the car in front of us or off to one side as we careen by, making sure that **nobody** gets in our way. As the **Little Flower, St. Terese of Liseaux** observed, it is not necessary to perform great deeds or heroic acts to express her love for God. She practiced what became known as **The Little Way**:

*"Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love."*

## **Peter, The Rock**

There seems to be a rift between Protestants and Catholics when it comes to the primacy of St. Peter as Chief Apostle and first Pope. The Catholic belief is that St. Peter was appointed by Jesus to lead the Apostles and the Church in his absence (**Matt. 16:15-19, Luke 22:31-32, John 21:15-19**). The classic Protestant position is that and that our **only** authority is the written word of God - the Bible.

As you know, the Lord said to Peter, “*And so I say to you, you are Peter (**Petros**), and upon this rock (**Petra**) I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.*” Many non-Catholics believe Peter is not the Rock but that the Rock refers to his confession of faith. It **couldn't** be Peter because the Greek words used here are **Petros**, meaning, *small stone* and **Petra**, meaning, *large mass of rock*. They say that the **Rock** is Jesus because he is referred to as **Rock** elsewhere, including, **Matt. 21:42** and **1 Pet. 2:3-8**. The problem with this is that Jesus **didn't** speak Greek to his Apostles - he spoke **Aramaic**.

What Jesus *actually* said was, “*And so I say to you, you are **Kepha**, and upon this rock **Kepha** I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.*” This is why St. Peter is referred to as **Cephas** in many of St. Paul's letters, because **Cephas** is the closest Greek transliteration of the Aramaic, **Kepha**.

There is another problem for the non-Catholic. **Petra** is a feminine Greek noun and could hardly be used to describe a man, so the word was translated as **Petros** in Scripture because it was being used in reference to a man. Jesus *clearly* appointed St. Peter as earthly head of the Church and Chief Apostle here in Matthew's Gospel as well as **Luke 22:31-32**, where he told Peter that he prayed for him to strengthen the other Apostles in his absence.

In **John 21:15-19**, Jesus confronts Peter 3 times, which mirrors the 3 times Peter denied Him. However, Jesus not only asks Peter if he *loves* Him – He tells Peter 3 times to feed His lambs, tend his sheep and to feed His sheep. Jesus doesn't give this instruction to any other Apostle.

## **Lenten Sacrifices**

The origins of Lent go back to the early Church in the centuries following the Apostolic Age. In fact, some Early Church Fathers, such as St. Leo in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, claimed that this practice went all the way back to the Apostles.

Although Lent is a time of prayer, good works, sacrifice and penance, culminating in the new life represented at Easter, giving something up for Lent is not actually required by Church Law. It *is*, however, an ideal way to prepare ourselves for the observance of our Lord's death and resurrection and a tradition that goes back to the earliest of times.

While many Catholics will give up something for Lent that they enjoy, others may choose to perform good works or make positive changes in their lives in place of self-denial. **Both** are excellent ways to bring us closer to God. And, whereas, making a sacrifice by giving up something for Lent might be the best way for somebody to bring them closer to God - **doing** something to enrich our faith might be better for others. Performing charitable acts, exercising patience, evangelizing, or making a real effort to treat others with love and respect, might be a good alternative to giving up chocolate or cutting back on coffee. Praying for self-control and becoming more familiar with our Catholic Faith is also an enriching and worthwhile endeavor, as are almsgiving and visiting the sick or others in need.

Our society is so driven towards physical self-improvement that many people have lost focus on the **real** meaning and purpose of Lent. Lent shouldn't be looked upon as simply a good excuse to go on a diet or to cut back on smoking or getting in shape. Our sacrifices should enrich our faith by reminding us that we are sinners in need of **repentance** which points us to the **ultimate** sacrifice – that of Christ on the cross.

If you have not yet begun your Lenten sacrifice - it's **never** too late to start.

## **Abstaining from Meat**

As Catholics, there may be times when we are asked a question about our faith and have no answer. One of those occasions may be when you are asked by a Protestant co-worker or family member, “*Why do Catholics abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent?*”

Since meat is usually the main course of most meals – as well as the most anticipated - abstaining from meat on certain days during Lent is an excellent way for Christians to practice this act of self-denial so that we can unite ourselves to the sufferings of Christ. **Rom. 8:16-17 and 1 Pet. 2:21** tell us that we that we receive grace from God when we suffer for what is good. We become joint heirs with Christ, who left us an example to follow when he suffered for us. In comparison to the sufferings of our Lord, abstaining from meat is really a minor self-denial.

Whereas most Catholics are aware that all persons over the age of 14 years of age are required to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Fridays during Lent, many are unaware that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) recommends that we practice abstinence and other penances on the remaining Fridays of the year.

St. Paul calls these disciplines of the flesh, “*mortification*” because by this denial of the body, we die to the flesh so as to live in the spirit: “*If you live after the flesh, you shall die, but if through the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.*” (**Romans 8:13**; see also **Col. 3:5, and Gal. 5:24**). Mortification is a good discipline for our souls as well as a means of strengthening our resistance to temptation.

St. Paul not only recommended mortification, he practiced it himself. In **1 Cor. 9:27**, he tells us, “*I drive my body and train it, for fear that after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*”.

## **ECFs on the Immaculate Conception of Mary. . .**

Although many non-Catholic groups reject Mary's Immaculate Conception as yet another "*Catholic invention*", we see that the **Early Church Fathers (ECFs)**, taught this from the very beginning.

### **Irenaeus**

Mary, betrothed to a man but nevertheless still a virgin, being obedient [no sin], was made the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. . . . Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith [A.D. 189].

### **Origen**

This Virgin Mother of the Only-begotten of God is called Mary, worthy of God, immaculate of the immaculate, one of the one [A.D. 244].

### **Hippolytus**

He [Jesus] was the ark formed of incorruptible wood. For by this is signified that His tabernacle [Mary] was exempt from defilement and corruption [A.D. 235].

### **Ephraim the Syrian**

You alone and your Mother are more beautiful than any others, for there is neither blemish in you nor any stains upon your Mother. Who of my children can compare in beauty to these? [A. D. 361]).

### **Ambrose of Milan**

Come, then, and search out your sheep, not through your servants or hired men, but do it yourself. Lift me up bodily and in the flesh, which is fallen in Adam. Lift me up not from Sarah but from Mary, a Virgin not only undefiled but a Virgin whom grace had made inviolate, free of every stain of sin. [A.D. 387].

### **Augustine**

We must except the Holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honor to the Lord; for from Him we know what abundance of grace for overcoming sin in every particular was conferred upon her who had the merit to conceive and bear Him who undoubtedly had no sin. [A.D. 415].

## **Mary, The Queen Mother**

The Kingdom of Heaven is modeled after the Davidic Kingdom. We can see this from the references to **Isaiah 22:20-22** when Jesus appointed Peter as the bearer of the “keys to the kingdom” (**Matt. 16:18-19**).

In the Davidic Kingdom, the wife of the King was *not* the Queen – but rather, his *mother* was elevated to that station. The title **Gebirah** (*Gebira*), meaning “**Great Lady**” or “**Queen Mother**” was a royal title and an office which was bestowed upon the mothers of the Kings of Israel but only to those in the line of David.

Jesus Christ is the heir of David. He is the fulfillment of the covenant promises made to David in **2 Samuel 7:16; 23:5**, and repeated to Mary in **Luke 1:26-36**. Mary’s son rules from the Kingdom of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is fitting that His mother should enjoy the same role that other Davidic Queen mothers enjoyed, that is the royal office of the heavenly **Gebirah**. It is in this sense that Catholics call her “the Queen of Heaven” and not in the pagan sense of that title as it is translated in English and found in **Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17, 18, 19, & 25**; which is a designation for an Egyptian goddess.

**1 Kings 2:19-20** tells us: *So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him about Adonijah; the king got up to meet her and bowed before her; he then sat down on his throne; a seat was brought for the king’s mother, and she sat down on his right.*

*"There is one small favor I would ask of you," she said. "Do not refuse me." "Ask it, my mother," the king said to her, "**for I will not refuse you.**"*

Just as with the Davidic Kingdom, as Jesus is the **King**, Mary is the **Queen Mother**.

## **Is There Salvation Outside the Church?**

The quick answer is, “**No.**” The longer answer might begin with, “Well, that all *depends.*”

In **John 14:6**, we read, “*Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.***” In **Acts 4:12**, St. Peter echoes this teaching, “*There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.*” This is a fact that has always been taught by the Church.

It is important to remember that Jesus identified the Church with his very self in **Acts 9:4-5** when he told Saul, who had been persecuting the early Church, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” He (Saul) said, “*Who are you, sir?*” The reply came, “***I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.***” In **1 Tim. 3:15**, St. Paul tells us that the Church is “*the pillar and foundation of truth.*” From **St. Cyprian** in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD, we read his firm declaration: “*Outside the Church there is no salvation.*” This teaching was repeated by many of the Early Church Fathers, the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council in 1215, the Council of Florence in 1442, the Council of Trent a century later, and by the Second Vatican Council. To deny that Salvation comes through the Church is to deny Christ himself.

However, the Catechism states that, “*Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation*” (CCC 847). This is what is known as *invincible ignorance*.

Just as Jesus told the Pharisees in **John 9:41**, “*If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains*”, a person who is invincibly ignorant of the truth through no fault of their own *may* be saved even though they may not be a member of the Church. It must be noted that this is not tantamount to a guarantee of salvation but a teaching based on the grace and mercy of God.

Conversely, a person who *knows* the Church to be the truth and rejects it anyway, cannot obtain salvation. This sentiment is affirmed in **Luke 12:48**, “*Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.*” We must remember that our ability to reason does not dictate our faith but our humility before the truth that is passed onto to us by those to whom Christ entrusted the task - and our acceptance or rejection of that truth.

## **When Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses Come Knocking**

Many Catholics mistakenly assume that all non-Catholic churches are Christian. Whereas most Protestant churches are Christian by definition, the *fullness* of Christian truth can be found only in the Catholic Church. Jesus established *one* Church and prayed fervently for the unity of his Body on the night before he died (*John 17*). St. Paul tells us in *1 Tim. 3:15* that the Church is “*the pillar and foundation of truth.*”

Although sects with names like, **The Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints** (*LDS, Mormons*) and **Jehovah's Witnesses** (*JWs*) seem to imply Christian faith, sadly, there are many reasons why neither group can be considered Christian. For instance, both the LDS and Jehovah's Witnesses alike deny the deity of Christ, as well as the Holy Trinity. Mormons actually believe that Jesus and Satan are spirit brothers, while Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is inferior to God the Father. The JW's *New World Translation* of the Bible actually alters many verses to convey their beliefs. One glaring example can be found in *John 1:1*, which refers to Jesus, where they inserted the word, “**a**”: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God.*”

LDS founder, Joseph Smith, claimed that an angel gave him a set of golden plates in 1827 which gave a historical account of ancient America and finally allowed him to restore the Church of early Christianity that had fallen into apostasy. This would have rendered Jesus a liar when he told St. Peter in *Matt. 16:18*, “*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*”

The *Bible Student Movement* was founded by Charles Taze Russell in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Russell, who falsely prophesied the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus in 1878, believed that all previous interpretations of Scripture were extremely flawed – until *his*, of course. In 1931, the name of his organization was changed to *Jehovah's Witnesses*.

The sad truth is that an alarming percentage of converts to both of these groups are poorly-catechized Catholics. Those who know little about their faith are easy fodder for door-to-door missionaries who offer a message, which, in contrast with seemingly rigid Catholic beliefs seems wonderful. The difference is that the Catholic Church was established by Christ himself and all others, by men.

We must keep these groups and *all* who have strayed from the truth of God in our prayers - as well as Catholics who are questioning their faith or feel the need to leave it altogether. We, as Catholics must always strive to learn all we can about our faith and the Word of God because it is in this knowledge that we can come to understand the will of God that we are commanded to follow.

## **ECFs on the Real Presence in the Eucharist**

It's always important to know the origins of our faith comes, especially in light of Protestant accusations that much of what we believe are merely Catholic "inventions". The **Early Church Fathers (ECFs)** of the first few centuries are our witnesses to the truth of God revealed to his Church. They - *some of whom learned from the Apostles themselves* - taught the reality of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist from the beginning.

**Ignatius of Antioch** - "Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. . . . They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer *because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again.* They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes." (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6:2-7:1 [A.D. 110]).

**Justin Martyr** - "We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, *except one who believes our teaching to be true* and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [i.e., has received baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these, but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, *the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus.*" (*First Apology* 66 [A.D. 151]).

**Clement of Alexandria** - "*Eat my flesh*" [Jesus] says, "*and drink my blood.*" The Lord supplies us with these *intimate nutrients*, he delivers over his flesh and pours out his blood, and nothing is lacking for the growth of his children (*The Instructor of Children* 1:6:43:3 [A.D. 191]).

**Cyril of Jerusalem** - "The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, *the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ.*" (*Catechetical Lectures* 19:7 [A.D. 350]).

**Augustine** - "That bread which you see on the altar having been sanctified by the word of God *is the body of Christ*, that chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, *is the blood of Christ.*" (*Sermons* 227 [A.D. 411]).

## **Cafeteria Catholics**

Over the years, you may have heard the term, “*Cafeteria Catholic*”. This is a phrase that is ascribed to those Catholics who feel that Church doctrines and dogmas are a matter of personal choice. Such individuals feel that certain Catholic teachings may be true for some – but not necessarily for them. They simply pass on the rest as if they had a choice. Those who fall into this category fall into the trap of **moral relativism** – “*what is true for you may not be true for me*”. Confession, fasting and abstinence, prayer, good works, the mass – even faith itself are simply passed over in what some falsely see as a *spiritual buffet*.

In **2 Thess. 2:15**, St. Paul tells us to “*hold fast to the tradition that we were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of theirs.*” To show how serious he is about this in the very next chapter, he goes on to say, “*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us*” (**2 Thess. 3:6**).

Jesus says of His Church in **Luke 10:16**, “*Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.*” When we reject Church teachings, we are really rejecting our Lord Jesus who identifies his very self with his Church in **Acts 9:4-5**.

The Church has God-given Authority (**Matt. 16:15-19, 18:15-18, John 16:12-15, 20:21-23**) to which we must submit as Catholics. At the Last Supper, Jesus told his Apostles the Holy Spirit would guide the Church to “*all truth*” about the things that were coming. This is why in **1 Tim. 3:15**, St. Paul calls the Church “*the pillar and foundation of truth.*”

When the Church declares a truth – it is not simply making something up that it is new. It is stating a revealed truth that the Church has always held. Historically, this is usually done in response to a heresy or other challenges to the faith. Groups such as “*Catholics for Choice*” and “*Call to Action*” have chosen to reject these revealed truths of God and have instead embraced a secular world view.

We must remember that Jesus established the Church as a means of dispensing God’s grace. Whereas, grace comes from God alone, the Church is His instrument, his channel for bestowing it upon us through the Sacraments. When we reject the Church, we reject *him* to his face. In the end, when it comes to our Catholic faith – the cafeteria is closed.

## **New Age Deception**

You see them on the Oprah Winfrey Show or hear them on the radio. These New Age “*spiritualists*” and “*prophets*” who espouse the notion that we are all “*God*” and that reality all is relative. **Nothing** is real unless we believe it to be so. In other words, reality depends on *who* is espousing it.

One such New-Ager is Oprah’s spiritual guru, Eckhart Tolle, whose book, “*A New Earth*” preaches that the present is all that matters, without any regard for the past or future. Tolle, like other New-Agers believes that is only our feelings that matter, not our intellect and certainly not our physical bodies. The misleading title of his book is simply a perversion of **Revelation 21:1**, which speaks of a “*new heaven and a new earth.*”

In this so-called “new age” – there is no need for religion, government, law because we will all be ruled by a common “peace, love, understanding”. Everything we do, no matter how sinful is good because we *will* it to be so. They teach that God is simply an “*energy force*”, not the Creator of heaven and earth or our Savior. All paths will lead to a higher spiritual consciousness or “*God*” – *whatever* you perceive that to be. Since “*God*” is *all* things, they teach – we *too* are God. This is in direct violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment in **Exodus 20:2-3**, where God says that **HE alone** is God and that we are not to have any false gods besides him.

Oprah herself claims to be a Christian, yet goes so far as to make the charge that “*Jesus didn’t come to start Christianity*” and that there are “*many paths to God*”. That is **not** what our Lord said. In **John 10:9**, he assures us, “**I am the gate.** *Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.*” Later in that same Gospel (**John 14:6**), as if to reiterate his point, Jesus says, “**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**”

An endorsement from Oprah means a *guaranteed* success – millions of dollars for any huckster who is willing to twist and even forego the truth for the latest new-age catch-phrase. Sadly, many fall prey to the deception of these charlatans who are not the least bit interested in being *prophets* so much as they are in reaping *profits*. They speak of the importance of being “*spiritual people*” yet have no idea what it means to be truly spiritual.

We must always be on our guard because as Jesus reminds us to beware of false prophets who are merely wolves in sheep’s clothing (**Matt. 7:15**). He assures us that the *truth* shall set us free (**John 8:21**).

Whereas this article is not an attempt to besmirch Oprah Winfrey personally, its purpose is to remind us that deception lies in everything around us – even in those societal icons we trust in to tell us the truth.

## Judging Others

Sometimes, when people feel as though they are being judged by another, they run for the shelter of **Matt. 7:1-5** where we are warned *not* to judge one another and to stop looking for the *splinter* in their eyes while we ignore the **beam** in our own. Although this is sound Christian teaching, there *is* a time for admonishment and correction.

Conversely, there are those who feel it is their duty to go around correcting everybody without exception, using very little tact or charity.

We must understand that just as our very ability to have faith is a grace from God – so is receiving correction when we are wrong. However – this goes both ways. We must do all things in charity and this sentiment is echoed in the many passages that instruct us to **lovingly** correct our brethren. For example, Jesus tells us in **Luke 17:3**, “*If thy brother sin against thee, **reprove him**: and if he do penance, **forgive him**.*” Charitable reproof is a common theme in the Scriptures (**2 Tim. 4:2, Gal. 6:1**).

In **James 5:20** we read that by helping a person to turn from the sinful ways we “*shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.*” As Christians, we know that we are saved only by Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf - but here, St. James is stressing the importance of **charitable** correction. Just as receiving correction when we are wrong is a grace from God – so is **charitably** dispensing correction and admonishment to our fellow man.

We must remember that as we judge, so will *we* be judged, and the measure with which we measure will be measured out to us (**Matt. 7:2**). As our Lord tells us in **John 7:24** – we must judge **justly**. We are told that we can judge a person’s fruits and that is how they will be known to us (**Matt 7:15-20**). However, only God knows what is in a person’s heart and it is not for us to condemn the person. We must condemn the **sin** – *not* the sinner, otherwise we ourselves will be held to that standard.

We must ask ourselves, “Am I judging **rightly** in the eyes of God – or am I simply being **judgmental**?”

## **Receiving The Lord Unworthily**

Sometimes at a wedding or funeral, you may hear the priest tell the people prior to communion that *only those who are baptized Catholics and prepared to receive the Eucharist* should do so. The reason for this is two-fold.

First of all, those who are not baptized into the Catholic Church and have not made their First Communion should not receive the Eucharist because to do so indicates that they are in full communion with the Church. By receiving, they are saying publicly that they accept all of the doctrines of the Church and have prepared to receive the Eucharist, which is the “*source and summit*” of our Catholic faith (CCC 1324).

Secondly – those Catholics who are not prepared to receive the Eucharist – that is, they are not in a state of grace and are in a state of mortal sin, should not do so, either. The Catechism states, “*Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion.*” (CCC 1385).

In response to the liturgical abuses being practiced by the Corinthians in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, St. Paul, explained the importance of being properly prepared to receive our Lord Jesus’ Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). He told them, “... *whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment (damnation) on himself.*” In verse 30, he goes on to say to them, “*That is why many among you are ill and infirmed, and a considerable number are dying.*”

As Catholics, we cannot take this lightly and must always be prepared to receive our Lord by going to confession when we are in a state of mortal sin. It is of the utmost importance that we are knowledgeable of what the Eucharist is. It is *nothing less* than the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ (CCC 1374).

## The Rapture

You may have heard the term, “*The Rapture*” from a Protestant friend or relative. Although the word itself doesn’t appear in Scripture, the idea that Christ will come back to rescue the “*elect*” from the coming period of persecutions against the Church is only about 175 years old. It is taken largely from a faulty interpretation of **1 Thess. 4:17**: “*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*”

Rapture theology finds its origin in the 1830’s, when a Protestant minister named John Nelson Darby began teaching this new idea to his followers, even though there was no Scriptural basis for it. Neither was there a basis for it in tradition since it had never been a teaching of the historic Christian Church. Since then, Darby’s novel *invention* has been picked up by many newer Protestant groups, that is, groups which have sprouted up over the last 100 years or so. It has also become the topic of many books and films, such as the “*Left Behind*” series.

The Bible is clear that the Second Coming of Jesus will be preceded by a period of persecution (**Matt. 24:20-31; Mark 13:19-27; 2 Thess. 2:1-4**) commonly referred to as the *Tribulation*. However, there is no mention of Jesus coming a second time to rescue his believers only to return a *third* time. When we read **1 Thess. 4:17** in *context* with the other Scripture verses that mention the Tribulation and the Second Coming, it is clear that is speaking about what is going to happen when the Lord returns at the *end* of time – *not* before.

Before the 1800’s, every Protestant denomination agreed with the Catholic Church that this event of being “*caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” would occur *simultaneously* with the Second Coming of Christ. Like many other aberrant pseudo-Christian teachings, belief in the Rapture has become widespread among Evangelical and Fundamentalist groups.

Because this has never been a teaching of the Catholic Church, many anti-Catholics use this as fodder to lure Catholics away from their faith. Sadly, they have succeeded in doing just *that* with this false doctrine of men (**Mark 7:7-8, Col. 2:22**). Jesus warned of false prophets whom he called, “*wolves in sheep’s clothing*”, that would lead people astray with aberrant teachings and about whom we would recognize by their fruits (**Matt. 7:15-16**).

As Catholics, we must be on our guard - not only as it pertains to our Lord’s glorious return, but also to be wary of false teachings that would lead us away from His mystical Body – the Church.

## **Jack Chick “Bible Tracts”**

Perhaps you’ve seen one of these mini comic book/Bible tracts at a gas station, phone booth or public restroom and wondered who put it there. The mysterious “**JTC**” in the bottom corner stands for **Jack T. Chick**, a virtual recluse, who is the most widely-published comic book author in the world. Chick is an author and artist who started distributing his comic booklets in the early 1960’s. His publications are now printed and distributed worldwide in virtually every language.

While he has published volumes about a myriad of subjects including Islam and Atheism, Chick’s favorite target is the Catholic Church. In his booklets, he blames the Catholic Church for everything from the start of Islam to the Holocaust during WWII. For those who are well-catechized and even those educated in secular history, Chicks deeply-flawed attacks on the Church seem almost comical. But, for those who are not so knowledgeable about their faith or history, these so-called “Bible tracts” have been the cause of much confusion and despair over the years and have been the impetus for leading many out Catholics of the Church.

Chick’s anti-Catholicism is extremely blatant and irreverent - and it shows in the titles of some of his tracts. Titles such as, “**The Death Cookie**” (*an attack on the Eucharist*) and “**Why Is Mary Crying?**” (*attacking Marian Doctrines*) shake poorly-catechized Catholics to the core. The back page usually includes the “Sinner’s Prayer” for those wishing to turn from their evil ways (*i.e., the Catholic Church*) and embrace his particular brand of Christianity.

Chick’s most famous anti-Catholic series (the “**Alberto**” series) is based on the supposed testimony of an alleged ex-Jesuit Priest named, **Alberto Rivera**. In it, he tells of the “*horrors*” and “*secret practices*” of the Church throughout the centuries and how it is the instrument of the Devil. He plays fast and loose with historical “facts” yet is unable to provide any proof for his allegations. Rivera’s exploits have been debunked many times not only Catholic scholars, but by Protestant theologians and scholars as well as prominent secular historians.

As Catholics, it is difficult to read such rubbish without becoming annoyed and even angry. But, we must remember that our Lord Jesus warned that his Church would be hated and attacked (**John 15:18-19**), but he also gave us the wonderful promise that the gates of hell wouldn’t prevail against it (**Matt 16:18**). As the mystical Body of Christ, we shouldn’t feel the need to be validated by the world because we have God’s loving *guarantee*.

## **Which Bible Translation Should I Use?**

Have you ever wondered which Bible translation the best for Catholics? This is a very valid concern because the wrong version could mean that the reader is using an incomplete translation, as well as one that has annotations and footnotes that are contrary to Catholic teaching.

First of all, it is important to understand that it was the Catholic Church that declared the canon of the Bible at the Councils of Rome (382), Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. This canon was reiterated at the Council of Florence in 1442 and again at the Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century because of the Scriptural chaos that was being caused by the Protestant Reformation.

Secondly, Catholic Bibles are bigger than those of our separated Protestant brethren. The Old Testament found in Protestant Bibles has 7 less books than Catholic Bibles (*Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and I & II Maccabees*) and shorter versions of the Books of *Esther* and *Daniel*. As a matter of fact, if Martin Luther had his way, their Bibles would have not included the New Testament Books of **Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation** because he felt that they were not canonical. Had it not been for pressure from some of his contemporaries, Protestant Bibles would have been much smaller than they already are.

When it comes to Protestant Bibles, there are usually 2 camps: The “*King James only*” (*KJV*) crowd - who claim that the *KJV* is the *only* accurate translation - and those who use all of the other translations. Some other popular Protestant translations include the **New International Version (NIV), New King James Version (NKJV), Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version.**

Catholic versions include the **New American Bible (NAB), the Douay-Rheims version, the Navarre Bible, New Jerusalem Bible**, as well as Catholic versions of the **Revised Standard Version and New Revised Standard Version**. There are a variety of Catholic translations that are useful for different reasons. Some like the literary style of the Douay-Rheims, while others like the footnotes in the Navarre Study Bible.

It is important for the Catholic to choose a translation that includes the 7 books that are removed from Protestant Bibles. When Jesus and the authors of the New Testament quote the Old Testament Scriptures, they make more than 100 allusions to those 7 books. We must remember that Jesus gave the Church the authority to declare the truth here on earth and promised her the guidance of the Holy Spirit (**John 16:12-15**). As Catholics, we must recognize that authority.

## The Sacrifice of the Mass

When it comes to the Sacrifice of the Mass, non-Catholics will ask the question, “*If the sacrifice was offered “**once for all by Christ**” (Hebrews 9:26-28), why do Catholics offer the same sacrifice at every mass – especially since the Father has already accepted it?* Another charge is that we *re-sacrifice* Jesus at every mass. This is simply a misunderstanding of the sacrifice of the Mass.

**Rev. 13:8** says that Christ was crucified *before the foundation of the world*. His is an **eternal** sacrifice before the Father. In God's eyes, Jesus is crucified before the foundation of the world and is **ever-present** as a sacrifice before him. Jesus never stops mediating on our behalf. **Revelation 5:6** says, “*And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a **Lamb standing, as if slain**, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.*”

In **1 Corinthians 11:27-29**, Paul speaks to the reality of the Eucharist and the **severity** of the consequences to those who take this lightly: “*Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, **eats and drinks judgment on himself.***”

This directly correlates to the Bread of Life discourse in **John 6**, where Jesus stated in no uncertain terms: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, **unless you eat** the flesh of the Son of Man **and drink** his blood, **you do not have life within you.** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.*”

The word **Mass** comes from the Latin, **Missa**, which means “*to send*”, “*to go forth*”, “*to dismiss*” Because the Mass represents the finished work of Christ for our very redemption, it is the ultimate prayer of the Church and the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith (*CCC 1324*). Many of the prayers and blessings in the Mass come directly from the Bible (**Matt. 28: 19, 2 Cor. 1: 2 & 13: 13, Psalms 51:6, James 5:16, 1 John 1:19, Luke 2: 14, Rom. 8:34, John 1: 28, Eph 5:20, Rev 7:12, Gen 1, Col. 1:16, Heb 1:3, 1 Cor. 15:34, 2 Tim. 4:1, Mark 9:24, John 11: 27, Mark 9:38, John 17:9 & 20, Phil. 2:4, Chron. 29:10, Psalms 72:18-19,119:10, Luke 1: 68, Matt. 5: 23 -24, Matt. 28:26-28, Mark 14:22-25, Isa. 6: 3, Rev 4:8, Mark 14:22,24, Matt. 26: 26 -28, Luke 22: 19 – 20: 1 Cor. 11:23-25**).

To deny the sacrifice of the Mass is to deny the eternal sacrifice of our Lord on our behalf.

## Anti-Catholicism

It has been called “the last accepted prejudice” and is alive and well in our society. Anti-Catholicism runs amok in the media and there appears to be no end in sight.

The recent scandal in the Church has given them the fodder they need to proliferate their campaign of bias against the Church – and God - for years to come. Priests are routinely portrayed as either being clueless and out-of-touch with society or as vicious predators, while nuns are portrayed as oppressed victims of a man-centered Church.

Organizations like **The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights** fight this war on a daily basis. They inquire and protest against those in the media who attack the Church with anything from blatant, slanderous campaigns to seemingly innocent comments made on sitcoms or other broadcasts. Motion pictures like, *Hail Mary*, *Dogma* and the historically inaccurate, *The Da Vinci Code* are more overtly anti-Catholic in nature. Other films like *The Golden Compass* and the recent remake of *Robin Hood* are presented in a more benign fashion.

Other faiths and belief systems are frequently spared the indignities and disrespect that is usually reserved for the Catholic Church. For example, in the recent film *2012*, the Vatican is completely obliterated by a natural catastrophe. However, out of respect for Islam – the filmmaker chose not to show the destruction of the Kabba in Mecca (Saudi Arabia) for fear of offending them.

In **Matt. 5:11-12**, Jesus says: “*Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*” However, this does not mean that we are to be doormats in the face of blatant prejudice. We must always stand up and be ready to defend Christ’s Church because it is his Body (**Acts 9:4-5, 1 Cor. 12:4-31**).

Neither does it mean that we should be on the attack - being overly-suspicious and paranoid of everybody and everything. Not all non-Catholics are anti-Catholic. **1 Peter 3:15** tells us, “*Always have an answer ready when you are called upon to account for your hope, but give it simply and with respect.*”

Jesus said of the Church: “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden*” (**Matt. 5:14**). “*Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me*” (**Luke 10:16**). As difficult as it is to do sometimes, we must pray for those who hate us and persecute us (**Matt. 5:44, Luke 6:27-29**).

## Vain and Repetitious Prayer

Have you ever heard a non-Catholic tell you that repeating a prayer is displeasing to God? They will tell you that the Bible speaks against this practice and will usually point to the following passage: “***And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.***” (Matt. 6:7). As Catholics, aren’t we violating the word of God with such devotions as the Rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet? Nothing could be further from the truth.

Despite what our non-Catholic friends may say, the Scriptures do not speak out against repetitious prayers to God. What they fail to understand is that when Jesus made this statement in **Matt. 6:7**, he was speaking about the nonsensical babbling of pagans to their gods – not the sincere prayers of the faithful. We read about them in **1 Kings 18:26-29**, where the pagan prophets on Mount Carmel tried to invoke Baal all day long, repeatedly calling on his name and performing ritual dances

In **Matt. 26:44**, our Lord himself prayed the exact same prayer three times in the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper. In the *Parable of the Determined Widow* in **Luke 18:-87**, Jesus emphatically states that God hears those who keep petitioning him in sincere faith: “***Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily.***” In **Luke 18:13**, the tax collector kept beating his breast and praying, “*God be merciful to me, a sinner.*” This was pleasing to God.

We see in **Rev. 4:8** that the angels pray the same prayer day and night without ceasing in the presence of almighty God, “***Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.***” **Psalm 136** goes on for 26 verses in a row, repeating the *exact* same prayer, “***God's love endures forever***”. Similarly, in **Dan. 3:56-88** we read the exact same prayer for 32 verses, which is “***bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.***” This is far more repetitious than a decade of the Rosary.

Could any of these examples be considered the *vain repetitions* that Jesus spoke against? Of course not. When reading the Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus himself recited these prayers in repetition. **Rom. 1:9**, **Rom. 12:12** and **1 Thess. 5:17** all command us to pray without ceasing. Whether they are prayers of adoration, repentance, contrition or petition - God loves us immensely and never tires of hearing our prayers.

## Voting Our Conscience

It seems like we are always in an election season. We are bombarded about the candidates and issues from all sides and are left to make the decisions of picking new leaders or voting in new laws and ordinances. For the Catholic voter, there are some non-negotiable issues that we should remember before going to the polls. They include, Abortion, Euthanasia, Embryonic stem cell research, Human cloning and Homosexual “marriage”.

Many candidates run their campaigns in support of these issues while others either oppose them or avoid them altogether. The truth is that many Catholics vote with a complete disregard for the truths of God as taught by his Church.

The Church, being the mystical Body of Christ, is the pillar and foundation of truth on which Christ himself bestowed his authority (**Matt. 16:19, 18:15-18, Luke 10:16, John 16:12-15, 20:21-23**). The truth is not optional – it is not up for grabs. **John 14:6** tells us that Jesus is the truth itself. Rejection of the truth for one’s own *version* of it is called *moral relativism*, which simply put, is the sin of pride.

If every Catholic in the U.S. voted according to Biblical principles and what is taught in the Catechism, abominations such as abortion could be a thing of the past in this country. The tragic fact is that many Catholics do not vote according to their faith and choose instead to elevate a variety of other, lesser important issues to the forefront. For example, it can be said that Abortion is arguably the most important and urgent issue of our times, yet many Catholics will vote for candidates who are in full support of Abortion “rights”. They vote against issues like Parental Notification while voting for euthanasia laws that are cleverly disguised as “*Death with Dignity*”.

In **Matt. 5:14, 16**, Jesus said “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.*” We must stop thinking as *worldly* people and think instead as **Godly** people. We are, after all, his Body of which **HE** is the Head. Pope Pius V stated, “*All the evils of the world are due to lukewarm Catholics.*” Sadly, his analogy was dead-on accurate.

We must remember that support of issues such as abortion and embryonic stem cell research are diametrically opposed to our beliefs as Christians. Voting to proliferate this evil makes us partakers in it. We cannot claim innocence in the face of evil when we have done nothing to stop it - and we **certainly** can’t claim that we are innocent when we actively participate in it. The bottom line here? You **cannot** be Catholic **and** pro-choice.

## Lukewarm Catholics

Because we live in precarious times, we must always be on our guard. We must wary not only of the things that would cause us to sin by our *actions* but also by those that would cause us to sin by our *inaction*. This is evident by the throngs of people who go to mass at Christmas and Easter but are mysteriously absent for the rest of the year.

It is also evident by our fear of public embarrassment which may cause us to recoil at the thought of making the sign of the cross in public or by refusing to come to the defense of our faith when the Church maligned at a party or around the water cooler at work. Jesus emphatically stated in **Matt. 5:14, 16**, “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.*” As such, we simply cannot pretend that we are not his children through baptism and then demand that he answer our prayers when we need something from him. Pope Pius V once state, “*All the evils of the world are due to lukewarm Catholics*”, because he understood the words of Jesus that we are to be the light of the world.

As Christians, we have a free will - however, the Holy Spirit does not coerce or force us to do good. God’s grace *enables* us to be filled with zeal for his word but we must cooperate with that grace. It gives us the *means* to do God’s will - but unless we say, “*Yes*” to God, we have taken his light and hidden it under a bushel (**Mark 4:21**).

Archbishop Fulton Sheen used to say, “*The easiest way to get to heaven is to take somebody by the hand and lead them there.*” If we keep the Good News of the Gospel to ourselves, we are no better than the condemned servant in **Matt. 25:24-30**. It is by **our** example that the world sees Jesus. This is why St. Francis of Assisi so wisely stated, “*Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary, use words.*”

In **Revelation 3:15-16**, God issues stern warning to those who choose not cooperate with his grace and instead choose to remain indifferent: “*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.*” This is a frightening prospect for *anybody* who claims to be a Christian.

Our separated Protestant brethren only have the Scriptures yet many of them are on fire for what they believe to be the fullness of truth. As Catholics, we truly *do* have the fullness of the Christian faith because we also have the Sacraments and the Authority of the Church that Christ left us (**Matt 16:15-18, 18:15-18, Luke 10:16, John 16:12-15, 20:21-23**). As Catholics, we have **ALL** the truth at our disposal – but what are we to *do* with that truth? In **Luke 12:48**, Jesus said, “*From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.*”

## Liberalism

The word, **Liberalism**, has its roots in the Latin word for **freedom** (*Liber*). Originally, the theological position of liberalism was in the realization that we are truly free with God, who has bestowed upon us a free will to accept and cooperate with his grace. The social and political application of liberalism was embodied in the belief of the freedom to educate oneself and to be free of totalitarianism and tyranny. The rights guaranteed by the framers of the Constitution extolled this form of freedom.

Today, liberalism has been co-opted by those who have perverted its original meaning. Instead of the true freedom of God's grace, a rejection of God, an embrace of secularism and an air of moral relativism have taken over. True liberty has given way to a sense of entitlement - if I'm free to *want* something, I **must** be allowed to **have** it. The reality is that if we use our freedom for what it was intended for - we become all the more, free. Today's liberalism believes that we are enchained and imprisoned by God

In our society, a person's "right" demands that another person or entity has a *duty* to provide that right for me – no matter how much that so-called "right" infringes on others. The right to kill babies by abortion or to peddle pornography within reach of our children has been disguised as the "*freedom of choice*" and the "*freedom of speech*."

Today's Liberalism has infected some in the Church – even some clergy and religious. Occult practices like Wicca, Reiki and other New Age philosophies – even the demand for homosexual "marriage" and the ordination of women priests have taken root within the Church.

Our Liberal society tells us that we are to be tolerant of everybody and everything – until it interferes with *their* agenda. It has tolerance for every evil under the sun, yet it *cannot* and **will not** tolerate God. 21<sup>st</sup> century liberalism hides behind the moniker of being "*Progressive*" while attacking anybody who disagrees with it as a "*right-wing whacko*". This convoluted logic is what led the late Catholic philosopher, G. K. Chesterton to quip, "**Tolerance is the virtue of a man without convictions.**" In **Matt. 10:33** Jesus said plainly, "... **whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.**"

As Christians, our responsibility is to the truth – first and foremost. In **John 14:6**, Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" The only other entity that is recognized as "*the truth*" in all of Scripture is the Church (**1 Tim. 3:15**), which is the Body of Christ (**Eph. 1:22-23**).

Can a Catholic be a liberal? It all depends on which definition you use - the *original* meaning or the hijacked 21<sup>st</sup> century definition of the word.

## **ECFs on Apostolic Succession . . .**

Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians deny the reality of **Apostolic Succession**, which is one of the four marks of the Church (One, Holy, Catholic, **Apostolic**). By rejecting the idea that Apostolic power was handed down to successors (Bishops), they not only deny the Scriptures (**Acts 1:20-26**), but the beliefs of the Early Church as well.

**Clement of Rome** - Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned, and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry (*Letter to the Corinthians* 44:1 [**A.D. 95**]).

**Ignatius of Antioch** - You must all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8:1 [**A.D. 110**]).

**Irenaeus** - And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles, and their successors to our own times: men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics rave about. For surely they wished all those and their successors to be perfect and without reproach, to whom they handed on their authority (*Against Heresies* 3:3:1 [**A.D. 180-199**]).

**Tertullian** - For this is the way in which the apostolic Churches transmit their lists: like the Church of the Smyrnaeans, which records that Polycarp was placed there by John; like the Church of the Romans where Clement was ordained by Peter. In just this same way the other Churches display those whom they have as sprouts from the apostolic seed, having been established in the episcopate by the Apostles. Let the heretics invent something like it. (*The Demurrer Against the Heretics* 32:1 [**A.D. 200**]).

**Clement of Alexandria** - After the death of the tyrant, the [Apostle John] came back again to Ephesus from the Island of Patmos; and, upon being invited, he went even to the neighboring cities of the pagans, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, and there to ordain to the clerical estate such as were designated by the Spirit (*Who is the Rich Man that is Saved?* 42:2 [inter 190-210 A.D.]).

### **Firmilion of Caesarea**

Therefore, the power of forgiving sins was given to the Apostles and to the Churches which these men, sent by Christ, established; and to the bishops who succeeded them by being ordained in their place (*Letter to Cyprian* 75:16 [**A.D. 255-256**]).

## **ECFs on the Assumption of Mary . . .**

Just as other doctrines that developed over time, the **Assumption** of our Blessed Mother was something that has been taught since the earliest of times.

**Pseudo–Melito** - If therefore it might come to pass by the power of your grace, it has appeared right to us your servants that, as you, having overcome death, do reign in glory, so you should raise up the body of your Mother and take her with you, rejoicing, into heaven. Then said the Savior [Jesus]: "Be it done according to your will" (*The Passing of the Virgin* 16:2-17 [A.D. 300]).

**Timothy of Jerusalem** - Therefore the Virgin is immortal to this day, seeing that he who had dwelt in her transported her to the regions of her assumption (*Homily on Simeon and Anna* [A.D. 400]).

**John the Theologian** - Every soul that calls upon your name shall not be ashamed, but shall find mercy and comfort and support and confidence, both in the world that now is and in that which is to come, in the presence of my Father in the heavens" . . . And from that time forth all knew that the spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise (*The Dormition of Mary* [A.D. 400]).

**Gregory of Tours** - [T]he Apostles took up her body on a bier and placed it in a tomb; and they guarded it, expecting the Lord to come. And behold, again the Lord stood by them; and the holy body having been received, He commanded that it be taken in a cloud into paradise: where now, rejoined to the soul, [Mary] rejoices with the Lord's chosen ones. . . (*Eight Books of Miracles* 1:4 [A.D. 575]).

**Theoteknos of Livias** - It was fitting ... that the most holy-body of Mary, God-bearing body, receptacle of God, divinised, incorruptible, illuminated by divine grace and full glory ... should be entrusted to the earth for a little while and raised up to heaven in glory, with her soul pleasing to God (*Homily on the Assumption* [ca. A.D. 600]).

**Modestus of Jerusalem** - As the most glorious Mother of Christ, our Savior and God and the giver of life and immortality, has been endowed with life by him, she has received an eternal incorruptibility of the body together with him who has raised her up from the tomb and has taken her up to himself in a way known only to him (*Encomium in dormitionem Sanctissimae Dominae nostrae Deiparae semperque Virginis Mariae* [ante A.D. 634]).

**Germanus of Constantinople** - You are she who, as it is written, appears in beauty, and your virginal body is all holy, all chaste, entirely the dwelling place of God, so that it is henceforth completely exempt from dissolution into dust. Though still human, it is changed into the heavenly life of incorruptibility, truly living and glorious, undamaged and sharing in perfect life (*Sermon I* [A.D. 683]).

**John Damascene** - It was fitting that the she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. (*Dormition of Mary* [A.D. 697])

**Gregorian Sacramentary** - Venerable to us, O Lord, is the festivity of this day on which the holy Mother of God suffered temporal death, but still could not be kept down by the bonds of death, who has begotten Thy Son our Lord incarnate from herself (*Gregorian Sacramentary, Veneranda* [ante A.D. 795]).

## **ECFs on Sunday vs. the Sabbath . . .**

Some Sabbatarian groups such as Seventh Day Adventists insist that most Christians have abandoned the Commandment, "Keep Holy the Sabbath." They refuse to accept the Bible verses like **Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2 and Col. 2:16** which speak of the Sabbath of the New Covenant being transferred to the day on which our Lord rose from the dead (Sunday). They also reject the practices of the Early Church Fathers (**ECFs**) who carried on this Apostolic Tradition.

**The Didache** (*Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*) - But every Lord's day . . . gather yourselves together and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned (*Didache* 14 [**A.D. 70**]).

**Ignatius of Antioch** - [T]hose who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e., Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death (*Letter to the Magnesians* 8 [**A.D. 110**]).

**The Didascalia** - The Apostles further appointed; On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the holy scriptures, and the oblation [sacrifice of the Mass]. [**A.D. 225**]).

**Eusebius** - [T]he day of his [Christ's] light . . . was the day of his resurrection from the dead, which they say, as being the one and only truly holy day and the Lord's day, is better than any number of days as we ordinarily understand them, and better than the days set apart by the Mosaic Law for feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths, which the Apostle [Paul] teaches are the shadow of days and not days in reality (*Proof of the Gospel* 4:16:186 [**A.D. 319**]).

**Athanasius** - The Sabbath was the end of the first creation, the Lord's day was the beginning of the second, in which he renewed and restored the old in the same way as he prescribed that they should formerly observe the Sabbath as a memorial of the end of the first things, so we honor the Lord's day as being the memorial of the new creation (*On Sabbath and Circumcision* 3 [**A.D. 345**]).

**Cyril of Jerusalem** - Fall not away either into the sect of the Samaritans or into Judaism, for Jesus Christ has ransomed you. Stand aloof from all observance of Sabbaths and from calling indifferent meats common or unclean (*Catechetical Lectures* 4:37 [**A.D. 350**]).

**Council of Laodicea** - Christians should not Judaize and should not be idle on the Sabbath, but should work on that day; they should, however, particularly reverence the Lord's Day and, if possible, not work on it, because they were Christians (canon 29 [**A.D. 360**]).

## **ECFs on Confession/Reconciliation . . .**

A study of the **Early Church Fathers (ECFs)** reveals the truths of the Catholic Church. As we have read in past articles, the Early Church carried the teachings of the Apostles over to future generations. These traditions and doctrines are the very same ones we adhere to today – **Confession** is no different. From the very 1<sup>st</sup> century on, we see that the historic Christian faith had always considered confessing one's sins to the Church a necessity. It wasn't until the Protestant Reformation - some 1500 years later - that this truth was disposed of by some and rendered unnecessary.

### **The Didache**

Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . . , On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure (*Didache* 4:14,14:1 [A.D.70]).

### **The Letter of Barnabas**

You shall judge righteously. You shall not make a schism, but you shall pacify those that contend by bringing them together. You shall confess your sins. This is the way of light (*Letter of Barnabas* 19 [A.D. 74]).

### **Ignatius of Antioch**

For where there is division and wrath, God does not dwell. To all them that repent, the Lord grants forgiveness, if they turn in penitence to the unity of God, and to communion with the bishop (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 3 [A.D. 110]).

### **Tertullian**

The Church has the power of forgiving sins. This I acknowledge and adjudge (ibid. 21).

### **Hippolytus**

"...and grant this your servant, whom you have chosen for the episcopate... before your face and to offer to you the gifts of your holy Church, and by the Spirit of the high priesthood to have the authority to forgive sins, in accord with your command (*Apostolic Tradition* 3 [A.D. 215]).

### **Cyprian**

Of how much greater faith and salutary fear are they who . . . confess their sins to the priests of God in a straightforward manner and in sorrow, making an open declaration of conscience. (A.D. 251).

### **John Chrysostom**

Priests have received a power which God has given neither to angels nor to archangels. Did [God] not give them all the powers of heaven? "Whose sins you shall forgive," he says, "they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (*The Priesthood* 3:5 [A.D. 387]).

## **ECFs on Peter's Presence in Rome . . .**

It is a commonly held belief among many Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestant groups that St. Peter was never in Rome because it is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Fortunately, we Catholics have the writings of the **Early Church Fathers (ECFs)** to prove many of our historical claims. To reject the Catholic position on the subject, one must reject or ignore the testimonies of the Early Church.

### **Dionysius of Corinth**

You have also, by your very admonition, brought together the planting that was made by Peter and Paul at Rome and at Corinth; for both of them alike planted in our Corinth and taught us; and both alike, teaching similarly in Italy, suffered martyrdom at the same time (*Letter to Soter of Rome* [inter **A.D. 166 -174**] as recorded by Eusebius).

### **Irenaeus**

Matthew also issued among the Hebrews a written Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were evangelizing in Rome and laying the foundation of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter (*Against Heresies* 3:1:1 [**A.D. 189**]).

### **Tertullian**

Let us see what milk the Corinthians drained from Paul; against what standard the Galatians were measured for correction; what the Philippians, Thessalonians, and Ephesians read; what even the nearby Romans sound forth, to whom both Peter and Paul bequeathed the Gospel and even sealed it with their blood (*Against Marcion* 4:5:1 [inter **A.D. 207-212**]).

### **Eusebius**

The Apostle Peter, after he has established the Church in Antioch, is sent to Rome, where he remains bishop of that city, preaching the Gospel for twenty-five years (*The Chronicle, Ad An. Dom.* 42 [**A.D. 303**]).

### **Peter of Alexandria**

Peter, the first chosen of the Apostles, having been apprehended often and thrown into prison and treated with ignominy, at last was crucified in Rome (*Canonical Letter*, canon 9 [**A.D. 306**]).

### **Lactantius**

When Nero was already reigning Peter came to Rome, where, in virtue of the performance of certain miracles which he worked by that power of God which had been given to him, he converted many to righteousness and established a firm and steadfast temple to God. It was he (Nero) that first persecuted the servants of God. Peter, he fixed to a cross; and Paul, he slew (*The Deaths of the Persecutors* 2:5 [inter **A.D. 316-320**]).

### **Cyril of Jerusalem**

[Simon Magus] so deceived the City of Rome that Claudius erected a statue of him, and wrote beneath it in the language of the Romans *Simoni Deo Sancto*, which is translated To the Holy God Simon. While the error was extending itself Peter and Paul arrived, a noble pair and the rulers of the Church; and they set the error aright... for Peter was there, he that carries about the keys of heaven (*Catechetical Lectures* 6:14 [**A.D. 350**]).

### **Damasus**

The first see, therefore, is that of Peter the Apostle, that of the Roman Church, which has neither stain nor blemish nor anything like it. The second see, however, is that at Alexandria, consecrated in behalf of blessed Peter by Mark, his disciple and an evangelist, who was sent to Egypt by the Apostle Peter, where he preached the word of truth and finished his glorious martyrdom. The third honorable see, indeed, is that at Antioch, which belonged to the most blessed Apostle Peter, where first he dwelt before he came to Rome, and where the name Christians was first applied, as to a new people (*The Decree of Damasus* 3 [**A.D. 382**]).

## Why We Genuflect

Have you ever wondered why we genuflect at various times during a mass or inside the church in general? If you have - you're not alone. Many Catholics, it seems, are not familiar with the various appropriate gestures that are to be observed when in a Catholic Church.

Whereas, a reverent or profound bow may be appropriate in certain situations, *genuflecting* is usually reserved for the Holy Eucharist. According to the **General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)**, “A genuflection, made by **bending the right knee to the ground**, signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as for the Holy Cross from the solemn adoration during the liturgical celebration on Good Friday until the beginning of the Easter Vigil” (274).

Genuflecting is not only reserved for the laity - priests are also bound by certain rubrics during Mass. The GIRM (n. 233) notes, “**Three genuflections are made during Mass: after the showing of the Eucharistic bread, after the showing of the chalice, and before Communion.** If there is a tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament in the sanctuary, a genuflection is made before and after Mass and whenever anyone passes in front of the Blessed Sacrament.”

Unfortunately, some people make only a half-hearted attempt to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, resembling a quick curtsy while others will stop briefly to bow or make a speedy sign of the cross. There are those who will genuflect or kneel before a statue of the Blessed Mother or other saint when entering or exiting the church – yet they will ignore the Blessed Sacrament. Finally, there are some who will completely forego **any** gesture and simply walk on by as if Jesus wasn't even there. Some people might not be able to genuflect at all due to physical limitations, which is permissible in those cases.

As Catholics, we *cannot* ignore the fact that our Lord is **physically** present (*body, blood, soul and divinity*) on the altar, in the tabernacle or the monstrance. His presence is as real as if he were to walk into our homes and sit down at the table. Would we simply whisk by him and ignore him if this were the case? Or, would we fall prostrate before him with awe and respect, paying him the proper homage and adoration reserved for God alone?

In the Gospels, Jesus said, “***This is my Body***” and “***This is my Blood***” (Matt. 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20). St. Augustine may have said it best for all of us when he stated, “*What you see is the bread and the chalice, that is what your own eyes report to you. **But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ.*** (Sermons 227 [A.D. 411])

## Tolerance

The word, *Tolerance* is one of the most abused and misrepresented words in the English language today. In our society, if we are not tolerant of every deviant behavior, we are labeled as being “*hateful, right-wing wackos*” or “*close-minded*”. The secular world loves to throw Bible verses in the faces of Christians such as, “*Judge not, lest ye be judged*” (**Matt. 7:1**), without having a real grasp of what that means. This verse means that we are not to *condemn* anybody for their actions because we will be judged with the same measuring stick that we held others to (**Matt. 7:2**). Judging a person’s heart is **God’s** business – *not* ours.

However, the Scriptures call us to discern from what is right and wrong and to be intolerant of sin, but always being respectful of others (**Lev. 19:17, 2 Tim. 4:2, Gal. 6:1, James 5:20**). This harkens back to the old adage, “*Love the sinner but not the sin*”. Abortion, pornography, divorce, homosexual “marriage” and sexual promiscuity are among the many things in our society that we are not only expected to tolerate - but *celebrate*. Most of us are afraid to leave the room with the television on for fear of an immoral commercial or preview being viewed by our children. But, we cannot blame society as a whole without taking some of the blame ourselves.

We simply acquiesced and caved in to this onslaught of immorality and have allowed it to happen. Maybe part of the reason is that we were concerned with the way we would be looked upon by others for standing up for what is right. After all, we wouldn’t want to look too *religious* or *extreme* before our friends or co-workers.

We must stand firm in our Christian principles, being careful not to fall into the “tolerance trap”. In an effort to be overly-fair with others, we sometimes find ourselves at odds with those principles, siding instead with the culture at large. We are Christians *first and foremost* – before being citizens of any country or government. We belong to God – *not to the world* - and we were paid for by Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. As Jesus told the Apostles, “**Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s**” (**Matt. 22:21, Mark 12:17**). We must give an account before God for what we *did* - and did *not* do in this life.

The great Catholic philosopher, G. K. Chesterton once quipped, “*Tolerance is the virtue of a man without convictions.*” When we look at the permissive world in which we live, we suddenly realize how *right* he was . . .

## Gay “Marriage”

Just about every year, we vote on various propositions. Some of them go away once they are defeated and others seem to reappear every so often. One issue that always seems to come back to the forefront is the idea of homosexual “marriage”, which we as Catholics cannot condone.

As American citizens, we are guaranteed certain inalienable rights such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness which are not reserved for heterosexuals alone. Homosexuals possess all of the human rights that are reserved for the rest of us. However, there are limits to these rights. For instance, a man can never be a duck nor can we ever consider a little girl to be a stone. Their behavior may resemble those things but they will always be human beings. Their respective biological make-up limits their existence to being representatives of the human race. The same can be said of marriage, which is the union between a man and a woman (**Gen. 2:21-25**). This is why **Gen. 2:24** tells us, *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”* When God created man and woman, he made it so that only a man and a woman could conceive children - *regardless* of what scientists may concoct within the environs of a laboratory or Petri dish.

No matter how many operations a person undergoes to resemble their favorite idol – they will never actually become them. Just as blue is blue and red is red – members of the same gender cannot be married. Nobody ever questions why a non-Jewish boy doesn’t get a Bar Mitzva or why a man cannot give birth – or even why beef jerky cannot be made out of chicken. There are no lawsuits nor is there any litigation on these matters because they are pre-ordained. Simply put - they *are* what they *are*.

The Catholic Church usually bears the brunt of the bad press on this topic. We are represented as gay-bashers or as being intolerant of any lifestyle that we don’t agree with. Just as we are not to be tolerant of any other sin such as stealing, adultery or fornication – we cannot be tolerant of *anything* that is considered sinful in the eyes of God. The Bible *explicitly* teaches that the homosexual lifestyle is gravely sinful (**Lev. 18:22, 20:13, Rom. 1:26-7**) – as is all sexual immorality (**Acts 21:25, 1 Cor. 10:8, 1 Tim. 1:9-11**).

## **Leaving Mass Early**

Have you ever felt the need to leave Mass early for whatever reason? Maybe you are running late for a brunch with friends or you have a ballgame to attend – or NFL Sunday is about to begin. Have you ever thought that if the situation were different, you might not be so inclined to step out before the final blessing? What if it was dinner at your CEO's house or you were on a date with somebody you cared for very deeply? Would you walk out early on those people?

Leaving before the final blessing or last hymn is largely a Catholic phenomenon. This early exodus is rarely seen in Protestant services or even those in Mormon Tabernacles and Jehovah's Witness halls. Why many Catholics so eager to make a beeline for the door before the Mass and the hymns are completed? We rush out of the Church and practically run each other over in the parking lot in an effort to be the first ones off the property. Is this behavior indicative of *faithful* Christians or of those of us who simply feel that there are more important things we can be doing with our time? God must be *first* in our lives – *everything* else is secondary.

Part of the problem may be that since attending Mass on Sunday is an obligation, some feel that they can leave as soon as the obligation is met. One should never see Mass simply an obligation - but as an opportunity. At every Mass, we are brought to Calvary as the eternal sacrifice of Jesus is re-presented before us. It is truly an honor and a blessing that we are witnesses to this sacrifice. It is, after all, this sacrifice that redeemed the world and allows us to obtain eternal salvation and be with God in heaven. We should see Mass as something we *get* to do – not something we *have* to do.

If we are in a situation where we have to be somewhere else while Mass is taking place – perhaps it would be better to attend Mass at a different time. On any given Sunday, there is a Mass being celebrated every half-hour within driving distance. Many parishes also offer Saturday night vigil Masses or on Sunday evenings. Is our post-Mass appointment so urgent that it is necessary for us to leave the physical presence of our Lord with such haste? Are we like the sleeping Apostles who abandoned Jesus in his hour of need in the Garden of Gethsemane in **Matt. 26:36-46**? Jesus said to them, “*So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*”

As faithful Catholics, it is our obligation to attend Sunday Mass. When we finally realize that it is our supreme honor to be present – perhaps we will stop being like the Apostles in **Matt. 26:36-46** and instead, give our Lord the attentive worship he deserves.

## **Cell Phones During Mass**

Every Sunday, it seems, a cell phone goes off right in the middle of the Consecration or other part of the Mass. This nuisance isn't reserved only for Sundays as it seems to occur during weekly Masses, Confessions, Eucharistic Adorations, etc. What, some might wonder, could be so important that it couldn't wait until after Mass?

If we have urgent or pressing business in our lives that simply cannot wait – perhaps it would be best for all if we chose another mass time that was more suitable to our needs and our schedule.

Before bringing a cell phone or other electronic device into the Church, we must ask ourselves the following questions: Is it absolutely necessary to carry my phone into the Church? Do I need my pager or iPod in the Church with me - or can I leave it in the car or at home? Would I take any of these devices into my boss's home or answer the phone at the table if he invited me over for dinner? Would I allow my cell phone to disturb the audience during a movie? If the answer to **any** of these questions is, “**No**”, it might be a good idea ***not*** to bring these devices into the Church in the first place. We might want to consider the fact that God deserves our undivided attention for the hour or so that it usually takes for a Mass to conclude.

If we wouldn't subject our boss or an audience at the local movie theater to this noise – why on earth would we subject our fellow parishioners who are trying to worship to this nuisance? More importantly – why are we demanding that God to wait for us until *we* are good and ready to join in the celebration of the Mass?

We read in **Matt. 26:36:45** that during his Agony in the Garden, Jesus was upset with the Apostles because they couldn't even stay awake and devote a few moments to him in his final hours. He chastised them for abandoning him in his hour of need. Aren't we doing the exact same thing when we conduct other business during Mass instead of focusing on Christ's sacrifice on Calvary? Cell phones, iPods, video games, idle chat and conversations are **all** things that can wait until after the conclusion of Mass.

Anybody can forget to leave their electronic device in the car, so it is incumbent upon us to listen to the request before every Mass to turn the power **off**. We owe that not only to our fellow parishioners – but to our Lord ***first and foremost***.

## The Priesthood

Sometimes the charge is made by non-Catholics that the Priesthood is now unnecessary and obsolete. They say that because of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, there is no need for priests because Jesus is now our high Priest. The truth is that Jesus is *indeed* our High Priest. However, the claim that the ministerial priesthood is dead because of what Christ did on Calvary is a failure to understand God's plan of salvation as well as the Scriptures themselves.

In the Old Testament, we read about **three** distinct levels of Priests: There was Aaron, the High Priest. Then, there was the Levitical/Ministerial Priesthood and finally, the General priesthood of the rest of Israel.

The New Testament also speaks of a three-tiered priesthood. First, there is Jesus, our High Priest whom we read about in **1 Tim. 2:5** and **Heb. 7:22-25**). Secondly, we read about the Ministerial/Levitical Priests (**James 5:14-15**). And, finally, we read about the General Priesthood of all Christians (**1 Peter 2:5-9**). Whereas the Old Testament priests would offer slaughtered bulls and goats as a sacrifice before God as reparation for sins, the ministerial priest in the New Covenant offers up the eternal and perfect sacrifice made by Christ on our behalf, which is represented in the Eucharist. New Testament fulfillments are *always* more glorious than their Old Testament types.

Jesus conferred the ministerial Priesthood onto his Apostles and gave them the power to confect the sacraments. God knew that, as physical beings, it was good for us to have physical means to carry on in our faith. Water, bread, wine and chrism (oil) are some of these elements. He also conferred upon the priesthood the power to forgive sins in his name (**Matt. 16:18-19, 18:18, John 20:21-23**). In fact, the very first thing he did before his Apostles after rising from the dead was to breathe on them and give them the power to forgive sins or hold them bound. There are only 2 times in all of Scripture where God breathes on man. The *first* is when he breathed life into Adam (**Gen. 2:7**). The *second* is when he gave the Apostles the power to forgive or retain sins in (**John 20:21-23**).

In the Epistle of Jude, we see that he spends much of this letter warning about those who perverted the early Church's Eucharistic celebrations by assuming the ministerial priesthood without the Church's consent (**Jude 1:11**). In this passage he compares them to the Old Testament rebellion of Korah and their subsequent punishment (**Numbers 16:1-35, 31:16**).

## Unity of the Church

As Catholics, when we speak of the Church, we usually think of the Catholic Church. However, all Protestant denominations consider themselves to be part of the one Church established by Jesus. In the centuries since the Protestant “Reformation”, the number of Christian denominations has skyrocketed to the neighborhood of 35,000, each with a different approach to the truth and all claiming to be “the Church.”

In the document *Dominus Iesus* - Benedict VI (then, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) points out that these denominations “are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church.” In other words, whereas all faithful non-Catholics who are baptized in the Trinitarian formula (*Father, Son and Holy Spirit*) are Christians, they are not in full communion with Christ’s Church, which is the Body of Christ.

Jesus established **one** Church. In **Matt. 16:16-19**, he told St. Peter, “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build **my church**, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” He never intended for there to be multitude of differing factions, all claiming to be, “**the Church.**” At the Last Supper, our Lord Jesus prayed fervently for the **unity** of his Church – that they remain **one** as he and his Father are **one** (**John 17:20-23**). This hope of Christ was dashed by the Reformation and the constant splintering that has occurred ever since. This splintering includes the many dissident pseudo-Catholic groups and individuals who have separated themselves from the Church in varying degrees because **they** have decided that the Church has gone off-track. In short, they have made the judgment that Christ was **wrong** when he said that the gates of hell wouldn’t prevail against his Church, forgetting the words of Christ to his Church in **Luke 10:16**: “Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

Jesus and his Church are inseparable as we see in **Acts 9:4-5**, where he identifies the Church with his very self. In **Eph. 1:22-23**, St. Paul tells us that the Church is “the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.” In **1 Tim. 3:15**, he refers to the Church as “*the pillar and foundation of truth.*” Christ himself is not divided and neither can his Church – his **Body** be.

As Catholics, we must pray for the unity of **all** Christians – so that all will honor the prayer of Jesus by returning home to the **fullness** of Christ. And, although separated from the fullness of Christ - they are our brothers and sisters in Him through Baptism.

## Christ Died and Rose for ALL

As Catholics, we are constantly reminded of the sufferings of Christ, whether it is at mass, during the recitation of the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross or by the display of crucifixes in our churches and homes. By contrast, it seems that many of our non-Catholic friends tend to de-emphasize the sufferings of Christ in order to emphasize his resurrection. Many refuse to own or display a crucifix depicting our suffering Lord and instead opt for crosses displaying the risen Lord. St. Paul emphatically states that as Christians, we preach Christ *crucified* (1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2; Gal 3:1, 5:11).

As human beings, it seems that we would prefer to think about triumph over tragedy – comfort over suffering. We sometimes wonder how we can refer to the day our Lord was put to death as “**Good Friday**” so we turn our focus, instead, to the Resurrection. But, it is only when we understand that it was through his suffering that we are redeemed that we begin to grasp why we refer to it as “**Good**” Friday. It’s important to remember that he rose **BECAUSE** he died. Try as we might – we simply cannot have one without the other.

As such, many Catholics around the world feel the need to attend mass only on the two biggest celebrations on the Christian calendar - Easter and Christmas. Their attendance on those days is indeed a good thing because it is *only* by the grace of God that we would even consider going to mass in the first place – even if only twice a year. However, if people would only realize that we are the family of God – his Body – they might be more inclined to attend mass regularly. Jesus did not suffer only for the regular Church-attende, but for ALL of mankind. 1 Tim. 2:4 tells us that God in his infinite love wills the salvation of *all* – not just some. However, whereas we are all *redeemed* (paid for) by the sufferings of Christ – *salvation* requires that we *cooperate* with the grace of God (Mark 16:20, Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 6:1). By staying away from the Body of Christ – we are resisting his grace rather than cooperating with it (Acts 7:51). We are also in direct violation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment to keep Holy the Lord’s Day.

The Lenten season, which culminates with the Passion of our Lord, as well as Easter Sunday, is a perfect time to re-evaluate our commitment to Christ. It is a time to realize that the price he paid was for **ALL** of us. But, unless we *respond* to that gift of love and cooperate with his grace, we are cheating ourselves out of the opportunity to be with him. Jesus doesn’t *force* his love on us, but on the cross, he stretched his arms open to show us the depth of his love for us. It is up to *us* to act upon it.

Before we celebrate with a brunch or other family gathering, we should take the time to remember that without the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross – there is no Resurrection or Easter Sunday.

## Hell

The very thought of hell is one that can be so terrifying that people would rather not think about it at all. It is without a doubt the most unpopular subject in all of Christianity. Much like the child who will close his eyes in an effort to make an undesirable sight vanish, so has the subject of hell all but disappeared from pulpits around the world. In fact, there are many pseudo-Christian sects that have done away with the doctrine of hell or have altered the doctrinal teachings of it to the point that belief in eternal damnation no longer exists. Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and others teach a heavily altered view of what the Bible teaches about hell.

We are warned many times in the Scriptures about the reality of eternal damnation that is reserved for those who reject the truth of God. We are told by Jesus in **Matt. 7:13–14** that the gate to salvation is narrow but the gate to destruction (hell) is wide and that many will choose to enter through that gate. **Isa. 33:11, 14, Matt. 25:31-34, 41, 46, Matt. 26:24, Mark 9:47–48, Luke 3:16-17, 2 Thess. 1:6-9** all speak to the reality of hell and its *eternal* consequences. **Rev. 14:11** also speaks of a never-ending state of torment. The Early Church Fathers unanimously echoed what Jesus and the Apostles taught about the reality of hell and its implications for those who choose to disobey God rather than remain faithful.

The good news is that we don't *have* to experience this eternal separation from God. Despite what our Calvinist friends teach, God doesn't create *anybody* for hell. **1 Tim. 2:4** tells us that God wills the salvation of all. Similarly, in **John 3:16** we are comforted by the assurance that God loved the world so much that he sent his Son – and whoever believes in him will have eternal life. Just as God doesn't drag anybody into heaven who doesn't want to be with him - he also doesn't send anybody kicking and screaming into hell against their will. It is by our *own* volition that we are rewarded or punished. It is our *cooperation* with God's free gift of grace that determines our fate.

Jesus tells us that those who remain faithful and *endure* to the end will be saved **Matt. 10:22, 24:13, 25:31–46**). In **Rev. 3:5**, we are told that God will not blot out our names from the Book of Life if we faithfully endure in him.

## **What It Means To Believe**

We are told many times in Scripture that we must believe in Christ if we want to be saved. **John 3:15-18, 3:36, 6:40, 6:47, 11:25, 20:31, Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:9-11, 1 Cor. 1:21 1, Tim. 1:16 and 1 Pet. 1:6-9, 1 John 5:10-13** all speak of how we are saved by believing in Christ. However, many do not fully understand just exactly what it means to believe. Having faith in Christ is a grace from God that requires our cooperation.

In recent years, it seems that we have been inundated with a barrage of feel-good, “easy-believism”. Many claim the Catholic Church has complicated the very “*simple*” message of Christ that all we have to do is believe in him in order to be saved. The Church *does* believe that we are saved by faith – but only if that faith is one that includes cooperation and obedience. Having true faith in Jesus is not an easy task, as we are reminded of in the Bible. Our cooperation and obedience includes:

- Being **baptized** (**Matt. 28:19-20, John 3:5, Rom. 2:29, Col. 2:12-17, 1 Peter 3:21**)
- Picking up our cross daily to follow him (**Matt. 16:24, Luke 9:23**)
- Works of mercy and charity (**Matt. 19:21, 25:31–46, Luke 18:22**)
- Obeying his commandments (**John 15:10**)
- Doing the will of the Father (**Matt. 7:21**)
- Dying and being buried with him through Baptism (**Rom. 6:1-11**)
- We must suffer with Christ (**Matt. 10:38, 16:24, Mark 8:34, John 12:24, Rom. 8:17, 2 Cor. 1:5-7, Eph. 3:13, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 1:8, 1 Peter 2:19-21, 4:1-2**).

We must remember that the Bible is a Catholic Book - written *by* Catholics, *for* Catholics - yet the truths contained in it have been twisted (**2 Pet. 3:16**) by some who have usurped the Church’s teaching authority. The Church is the *fullness* of Christ to which we must remain obedient (**Matt. 18:15-18**) because it is the very Body of Christ (**1 Cor. 12**) which he compared his very self with (**Acts 9:4-5**). Are we doing what has been commanded of us? Are we obedient to Jesus and his Church? Or have we accepted the *falsehood* of easy-believism?

## Apparitions

Many people have a skewed understanding of apparitions and their implications. Some believe that only the very holy experience these miracles, which is not the case. Others think that only people who are emotionally imbalanced experience these “miracles”, while others (including Catholics) display unreserved skepticism. This is not difficult to understand since, at least once a year, we hear on the local news about somebody seeing Jesus on a can of Spaghettios or the Blessed Mother on their buttered English muffin. After all – didn’t Jesus warn that there would be those who would claim to see him in a field or other place (**Matt. 24:25-26**)? He was speaking of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming and not about private revelations. If his warning included apparitions, St. Paul would not have claimed to see him on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9:3-5**) long after his Ascension to heaven.

On the other hand, we also have those who would believe in any apparition they see on the evening news. It seems that some need to see some *proof* in order to have faith. There is a need to experience an almost magical quality just so that they can say that they witnessed it. Both camps have valid reasons for their belief and/or skepticism, as does the Church who investigates these matters *heavily* before rendering a decision or opinion. In Church-approved apparitions such as **Our Lady of Lourdes** and **Fatima** or the appearance of our Lord to **Sister Faustina and the Divine Mercy**, these matters were looked upon favorably by the Church but only after exhaustive research, prayer and intense scrutiny.

Catholics are not obliged to believe in or have a devotion to these types of private revelations. However, they are efficacious for us in that they display the power of God and illustrate his infinite love for us, including the Marian apparitions which happen solely by the power of God. For Catholics to cling onto every reported “apparition” seen on television may be imprudent, we should look to the Church to guide us in these matters because of the Authority given her by Christ himself (**Matt. 16:18-19, 18:15-18, Luke 10:16, John 16:12-15, 20:21-23**).

On the other hand we cannot simply reject every apparition as bogus, either. We must remember that our Lord appears to us in the form of bread and wine during *every* mass in the Holy Eucharist.

## Stewardship

As Catholic Christians, we have a responsibility to be good stewards of the gifts and treasures that God has bestowed on us. Since everything we have is from our Father in heaven, *everything* belongs to him. As stewards, we are only using what is rightly his. Just as Jesus taught in the **Parable of the Talents**, we must give an account to God for everything we **did** and did **not** do with what he entrusted us with.

In the **Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:12-28)**, you might remember that the first 2 servants used their master's money (talents) to earn even more for him. The 3<sup>rd</sup> servant buried his master's money in the ground and returned *exactly* what he initially gave him. This servant was dealt with harshly by his master because of his laziness. God gave each of us talents and treasures that we are to use with which to glorify *Him*. When we refuse to employ what God has given us to use for His glory - we are not being good stewards but are behaving instead, like the condemned servant. It is with this sense of responsibility that we should view how we can serve the Church, which is the *Body of Christ*.

No matter how meager we might feel our particular talents are, they are needed. As St. Paul tells us in **1 Cor. 12**, although we are **ONE** Body, we are **MANY** parts - and each part has value and purpose.

If God has entrusted us with great wealth, our responsibility as stewards might be one of financial support. Just as with our time and talent, our financial wealth also belongs to God and what we do with that wealth must also glorify Him. Our time, talent, and treasure will also glorify God when we apply them to our personal lives. Using the gifts God has given each of us to serve the Church and our parish community is as relevant and important as it is in the way we apply that same stewardship to our families - because we are the **Family of God**.

As we saw in **1 Cor. 12**, we are more radically joined together as the Body of Christ than the finger is to the hand, the foot to the leg. **Verse 26** says of the Body of Christ: ***"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."***

Our call to serve the body of Christ comes from none other than our Lord himself: ***"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me"*** (John 12:26). As the **U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship** states, ***"Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option."***

## Our Free Will

Have you ever been told that we do not possess a free will and that God preordains everything? Our Calvinist friends believe in **Double Predestination** which holds that God predestined *some* for heaven and *others* for hell. If this were the case, why do they bother to evangelize? Didn't Jesus tell the apostles to "*make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all*" (**Matt. 28:19-20**)?

As Catholics, we believe that it is *our* choice as to whether we wind up in either place. Just as with Adam and Eve, our response to God's call is an example of our free will. We can either accept the grace to believe or reject it since it is a free gift. If his grace is forced upon us, it no longer remains a gift but a sentence.

The Bible warns us over and over that we can have a full, experiential knowledge of Christ and yet, we can fall away because we choose to follow our own will instead of God's (**Matt. 7:19-23, 24:13, Rom. 11:22, 1 Cor. 4:4, 9:27, Hebrews 10:26-27, 2 Pet. 2:20-22, Rev. 3:5**).

The Church teaches - *as does the Bible* - that we have a free will (**Matt. 7:19-23, 10:22, 23:37, 24:13, 25:31-46, Luke 12:46, John 15:1-6, Rom. 11:22, Heb. 10:26-27, 2 Pet. 2:20-22, 1 Cor. 9:27, Col. 1:21-23, 1 Tim. 1:18-20, 4:1, Heb. 3:6, Heb. 3:12-14, 6:4-6, 2 Pet. 3:17, 1 John 2:24, Rev. 3:5, 22:19**). Whereas some events and people may have been predestined for good - *nobody* has been predestined for hell, as God cannot be the author of evil.

When the Scriptures speak of God's "foreknowledge" or "predestination", we must remember that he is out of time and is not bound by the same constraints that we are. To say that God *foreknew* something is simply a human explanation of describing that he **ALWAYS** knew. With God - everything is like a finished painting that he has always seen and continues to see for eternity. This, however, does not mean that he ordained everything that is in that painting because his will is not always followed.

One proof of this is **1 Tim 2:4**, which states that God wills the salvation of **ALL** men. We know that not all will be saved because they exercised their free will to reject him. Jesus tells us so in **Matt. 7:13-14** "*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.*" This is **our** choice.

## **Have you “Accepted Jesus as Personal Lord and Savior”?**

It’s difficult to go through life without having been asked this question by a non-Catholic friend, door-to-door missionary or televangelist. We are then told that we must simply make a “**Sinner’s Prayer**” after which we are saved and our fate is sealed. The better question might be, “*Where are we ever told to do this in Scripture or Sacred Tradition?*” Since most non-Catholic Christians believe that the Bible alone is our sole authority (Sola Scriptura), wouldn’t it stand to reason that this would be *explicitly* spelled out in Scripture?

The fact is that just as Sola Scriptura *itself* is a self-refuting and false doctrine, there is simply no basis for the false teaching that all we must do is believe and “accept” Jesus. To support this doctrine, our non-Catholic friends will point to **Rom. 10:13**, which says, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” However, we read in **Matt. 7:21** that, “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.*”

Whereas, “accepting Christ” or *choosing* to follow him is a decision we must make – we are also told by Christ himself that we must be baptized in the Trinitarian formula (**Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16**). We must love our neighbor (**Matt. 22:39, Mark 12:31**). We must remain faithful to the end (**Matt. 10:22, 24:13**). We must eat his flesh and drink his blood (**John 6:31-71**). The Bible is clear that salvation is not a one-step occurrence but a *lifelong* process. The initial grace of salvation is the gift of faith that we receive from God – the grace to believe in Him. However, as we are shown over and over in Scripture – salvation can be lost by our own doing (**Matt. 5:13, Rom. 11:22, Heb. 10:26-27, 2 Pet. 2:20-22, 2 Pet. 3:17, Rev. 3:5**).

It is also interesting to note that the Bible calls the virtue of *love* the greatest virtue – and *not* faith or hope. It is *love* that motivates our willingness to obey God and his Church. It is *love* that is behind every charitable act. And, it is *love* that fuels our faith and hope in God. Our obedience to God’s will is essential. Jesus left us the Church, which is his very Body (**Acts 9:4-5, 1 Cor. 12**). It is the *fullness* of him (**Eph. 1:22-23**) and is “*the pillar and foundation of truth*” (**1 Tim. 3:15**). Jesus gave total Authority to his Church (**Matt. 16:18-19, 18:15-18, Luke 10:16, John 16:12-15, 20:21-23**). Consequently, disobedience to his Church is disobedience to **Jesus himself**.

Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? The more important question is, “**Are you enduring in faith through obedience to Christ and his Church?**”

## **“Bible” Christians**

When asked which church they belong to, many non-Catholics will identify themselves as “Bible Christians”. This would seem to make sense since most Protestant groups adhere to *Sola Scriptura* (*the Bible alone is our final authority*). However, each particular group is dependent on its *pastor’s* interpretation of the Scriptures. The fact is that since the New Testament was written, compiled and declared canon by the Catholic Church – Catholics are the *original* “Bible Christians”. However, since the Church existed before the New Testament was written, the Bible came *from* the Church – **not** the other way around.

St. Augustine once said that the New Testament lies **hidden** in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is *revealed* in the New. This means that since the covenant of the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Covenant of Christ, the Church is the New Jerusalem – the Bride of Christ.

Every writer of the New Testament was a Catholic, since Christ established only **ONE** Church – not thousands of splintered sects. The original Greek manuscripts of Acts of the Apostles show the Church being called “**Catholic**”. In **Acts 9:31**, the term, **καθ ὅλης** (*kata holos*) is used to describe the Church of the Apostles. We first see the Church using the name “**Catholic**” at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in St. Ignatius’ **Letter to the Smyrnaeans**:

*“The sole Eucharist you should consider valid is one that is celebrated by the bishop himself, or by some person authorized by him. Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as, wherever Jesus Christ is present, **there is the Catholic Church** (Letter to the Smyrneans 8:2 [A.D. 110]).*

In **2 Tim. 1:14**, St. Paul admonishes Timothy to “*Guard this rich trust with the help of the holy Spirit that dwells within us.*” This “*rich trust*” that St. Paul speaks of is the Scriptures and Tradition handed down by the Apostles. The New Testament is a Catholic compilation – written *for* Catholics, by Catholics who never considered themselves to be “**non-denominational Bible Christians**”. They belonged to the Body of Christ – the *Catholic Church*, which was established by Jesus himself (**Matt. 16:16-19**).

## **Showing Proper Reverence For The Blessed Sacrament**

It is a sad thing to see in many Catholic Churches. Irreverence toward the Holy Eucharist seems to be commonplace. As the Catechism states, “*The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life” (1324)*. You would never know this by witnessing some of the ways our Lord is disrespected in Catholic Churches all over the world. To truly understand why great reverence **must** be paid to the Holy Eucharist, we must first understand **what** it is.

The Holy Eucharist is nothing less than the **Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity** of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins and rose from the dead, giving us the hope of eternal life. The Early Church paid so much reverence to this fact that they were deemed “**cannibals**” by their pagan Roman counterparts and were systematically ***butchered*** for this belief.

On any given day in a Catholic Church, you may see people lined up to receive the Blessed Sacrament giggling or chatting with one another. You might witness a person with a purse or car keys in hand waiting to dash out as soon as they are given our precious Lord in Holy Communion. Some simply stick their hand out as to receive a piece of candy, responding with a brief, “***Thank you***”, instead of declaring “***Amen***”. Others will walk back to their pew and consume the Lord there, while others will take the Eucharist home to give to a sick relative or friend or simply keep it in their homes. **ALL** of these instances are scandalous and disgraceful as they all fail to show the proper respect and reverence we are to have for our Lord.

The proper way to receive Communion is to first ***ensure*** that we are prepared to receive – making ***certain*** that we are not in mortal sin, as knowingly receiving in this state is a **sacrilege (CCC 2120)** which compounds our existing mortal sin. We must approach the Blessed Sacrament with all due reverence, bowing or genuflecting before we receive it. If we receive in the hand, we are to make a “**throne**” with our hands, placing one under the other, responding with, “***Amen***”. Then, taking hold of the Eucharist with the hand from underneath, we are to consume it immediately. There is no need to make the sign of the cross, genuflect or bow toward the empty tabernacle at this point because we have the ***ultimate*** substance – Jesus Christ **within** us. We, then, return to our seats, reflecting and meditating on the awesome miracle we have just taken part in.

Jesus said, “***Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink***” (John 6:54-55). Are we showing him the proper reverence he deserves – or are we simply going through the motions?

## Causing Scandal

When we hear the word, “*scandal*”, especially in a Christian context, we tend to think about the recent scandals involving those in the clergy. The fact is that we can cause scandal in the everyday lives. Whereas, we may not make any news headlines, the scandal we cause by our practices or by those with whom we consort are no less serious. Simply put, giving scandal are those things we do that tempt others to sin.

Causing scandal may include the cohabitation of a couple *outside* of marriage. Even if the couple vows not to engage in marital relations, their **public** example might lead others who *don't* have that same sense of abstinence to engage in morally devastating behavior.

Another way a person might give scandal in their personal lives is by the company they keep. It is *one* thing to keep company with others who might be living immorally because we are trying to be a good influence on them. It is quite *another* to publicly consort with them and simply ignore their scandalous behavior, all in the name of **tolerance**. The great Catholic philosopher, **G.K. Chesterton** once quipped that, “*Tolerance is the virtue of a man without convictions.*”

Let's face it – scandal is usually caused by the sinful behavior of those *closest* to us. Not many people will follow a complete stranger from a Godly life into a life of morally reprehensible behavior. Reluctantly or not, we **usually** follow those whom we love and respect. They have the *most* influence over us. Coaxing those close to us to engage in sinful behavior by telling inappropriate jokes or stories, excessive drinking, frequenting strip clubs or other morally bankrupt places are some of the ways that we give scandal to the Body of Christ.

We are representatives of Christ - children of God. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ which means that he has *paid* a price for us (**Acts 17:11, 1 Cor. 6:20, 1 Cor. 7:23**). We do not belong to *ourselves*, but to **God** Himself and we should behave accordingly. We cannot give scandal to the Church unless we are **part** of it. As members of the Church, which *is* the Body of Christ (**1 Cor. 12**), we must remember that not only are we surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (**Heb. 12:1**), God knows what is in our hearts (**Gen. 6:5, Prov. 15:3, 1 Kings 8:39, Jer. 17: 9**) and has issued a severe warning to those who would lead others into sin (**Matt. 18:6-7**).

## **Dissident Catholics**

A dissident Catholic is one who *claims* to be a Catholic but will not adhere to various doctrines of the Church – be they dogmatic positions or disciplinary ones. Dissident Catholics lay claim to the *title* of “Catholic” but when it comes to *living* their Catholic faith, everything is up for grabs. Whether it is a refusal to regularly attend mass, adherence to Lenten Friday abstinence - or a matter of morality such as abortion or contraception – dissident Catholics practice their faith on their terms, **not** God’s.

We must remember what Jesus told the Apostles – the first leaders of the Church: “*Whoever listens to you (the Church) listens to me. Whoever rejects you (the Church) rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me*” (**Luke 10:16**). This is not an enviable position for *anybody* to be in as Jesus also said, “*But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.*”

In **Acts 9:4-5**, Jesus confronted Saul, who was persecuting the Church. He said, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” He said, “*Who are you, sir?*” The reply came, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.* In this verse, Jesus equates the Church with is *very self*. Later, in his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul stated that the Church was the *fullness* of Christ (**Eph. 1:22-23**).

After the **First** and **Second Vatican Councils**, many Catholics effectively broke away and started their own versions of what they thought the Catholic Church should be because they believed the Church to be in error. This included priests and bishops who created new orders, ordaining others *without* permission from the Holy See. In doing so, they rejected Jesus’ promise to the Church in **John 16:12-15**, when he promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the church to **ALL** truth.

This splintering was in direct conflict with the words of Jesus, as is all splintering of the Body of Christ. In **John 17**, Jesus prayed fervently for the *unity* of the Church – to remain **ONE** as He and the Father are **ONE**. This prayer for unity is dashed every time we reject the teachings of the Church and opt instead for our *own* versions of the “truth”. Jesus said that **HE** was the Truth (**John 14:6**) – and St. Paul echoed that very sentiment about the Church, calling it “*the pillar and foundation of truth*” (**1 Tim. 3:15**). The so-called “**Reformation**” was another example of how flawed humans will often pit their *own* will against God’s will.

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. For Catholics, remaining faithful and obedient to the Church is *not* a choice – it’s a requirement.

## **Is The Catholic Church “*Filthy Rich*”?**

This is a charge that is often uttered against the Church by anti-Catholics who never seem to have their facts straight when attacking the Church. They point to the “riches” of the Vatican and say, as Judas did, “*sell it and give the money to the poor!*” (**John 12:5**). Judas said this in response to Mary (sister of Lazarus), who broke an expensive bottle of perfumed oil and anointed Jesus’ feet with it. But Jesus corrected Judas, saying, “*You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me*” (**John 12:3-8**). Jesus’ words seem cruel and callous towards the poor, but he was pointing out that by her actions, she used this valuable perfume to build up the kingdom of God. At first, the words of Christ seem to contradict his conversation with the rich man in **Luke 18:22** when he told him “... *go and sell everything you own and give it to the poor.*” The difference is that the rich man’s valuables were *not* building up the kingdom of God while the perfume *did*.

The fact is that the Vatican’s annual budget is the about the size of the budget of the Archdiocese of Chicago. That money *is* used to build up God’s Kingdom - as is *all* of the money that is raised by the Church. Here are a few *other* facts: The Catholic Church is the **largest** charitable organization in the world as well as the **largest** global health care provider. This means that more people are being served and aided by the Catholic Church than by any other entity because the Church is living out the words of Jesus.

Being the largest Christian entity – as well as the largest charitable organization – the Church comes under fire more than any other. This is due in part to the **perceived** wealth of the Church – and to **history**. Most of the smaller Christian communities that exist today are splinter groups that were splintered from splinters from the ecclesial communities of the original Protestants who broke away from the Catholic Church. As such, they usually have an axe to grind with the **original** Church established by Jesus Christ (**Matt. 16:16-19, 18:15-18, Luke 10:16, John 20:21-23**).

Much of the art and architecture in the Church was used through the centuries to teach the **mostly** illiterate populace that existed until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas, we now have Bibles, books and the internet to learn more about our faith – they had paintings, sculptures and beautifully reverent places of worship. As with the Temple that Solomon built, God deserves our **first** and **best** – not the leftovers. If the Church were to attempt to sell off its so-called riches and treasures – who could afford them, as most of them are priceless? Would they then continue to build up the Kingdom of God - or some wealthy financier’s portfolio?

## Why Do I Remain Catholic?

This is a question that each of us must ask ourselves during our lifetime. Are we Catholics because we were baptized into the Church when we were infants and have *always* identified ourselves this way? Is it to keep peace in the family? Is it out of complacency - or is it simply because we don't know where else to go? If you can relate to any of these reasons, this article is for you.

The Catholic Church is, in fact, the very **same** Church that was built by our Lord, Jesus Christ (**Matt. 16:16-19**). It is the same Church to whom Jesus granted **ALL** authority on earth (**Matt. 16:18-19, 18:15-18, Luke 10:16, John 16:12-15, 20:21-23**). It is also the same Church with whom Jesus identified his very self (**Acts 9:4-5**) and the same one that St. Paul called, "*the pillar and foundation of truth*" (**1 Tim. 3:15**) and the "*fullness*" of Christ (**Eph. 1:22-23**). No Protestant denomination can make these claims because they were all established by *men* some 1500 years after the death of the last Apostle and beyond.

History has shown us that no manmade institution has withstood the test of 2000 years of unchanged doctrine and continuity. The Catholic Church has for **one** reason: It is *not* a manmade institution but the Mystical Body of Christ of which he is the Head. The Church of the Apostles is the very same Church that stands today with its Sacraments and valid Apostolic Succession of bishops. Whereas, doctrine **can** and **does** develop over time, those official doctrines and dogmas are beliefs that the Church has always held. The Church does not swap out its doctrines to "*fit with the times*" as virtually every Christian denomination has over the years – such as in the case with contraception. Jesus assured the Apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church to ALL truth (**John 16:12-15**).

Many non-Catholic communities these days are fond of calling themselves "non-denominational" and reject the moniker of "**Protestant**" because their particular group did not *directly* break away from the Catholic Church. The fact is that since Protestantism is so splintered, every single denomination can trace itself all the way back to the "**Reformation**".

Once a person understands that the Catholic Church is the Church built by our Lord, they can truly appreciate *why* they remain in the Church. Hence, the faith statement of the *knowledgeable* Catholic should be, "*The Church isn't right because I believe it to be so. I believe it to be so because it is right.*"

## **Religious Persecution**

Our Lord never said it was going to be easy on earth. In fact, he said that the world would *hate* us because of his name (**Matt. 10:22, John 15:18**) and that it hated him *first*.

The current administration's policy requiring Catholic health insurance plans to cover contraception and abortifacients for women - as well as the so-called "*compromise*" to that policy - is government-sponsored persecution and an assault on religious freedom that is *unprecedented* in American history. If history warns us of *anything* - it's that the **initial** steps in the attack against religious liberty are **just** as crucial as the *final* steps.

Many people living in Germany in the 1930's thought nothing of Hitler's methodical attack on the Jews. It wasn't until the atrocities came to light that people cringed - and not until the end of the war that they saw the *depth* of the evil that was perpetrated on the Jews and others.

One of the most frightening commentaries about what happened during that time was encapsulated in the poem, "*First They Came . . .*" by German Lutheran Pastor **Martin Niemöller**, who suffered in the German concentration camp, *Dachau*. It chronicles the downfall of society in Nazi Germany and begins with the list of who the Nazis went after - and the complacent attitude of much of the public:

*“. . . then they came for the **trade unionists**, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the **Jews**, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew.  
Then they came for the **Catholics**, and I didn't speak out because I was Protestant.  
Then they came for **me** and there was no one left to speak out for me.”*

If all Catholics voted according to **Christian ethics** instead of a *politically-correct*, liberal agenda and stood up against this kind of governmental persecution and constitutional manipulation, we could put a **stop** to it. If all Christians - **Catholics and Protestants** - took a stand against the atrocity of **abortion**, we could **end** it tomorrow. If we all sit around and do **nothing** or continue to vote for those who proliferate these policies - we can expect more of the same or **worse**. Scripture tells us that we will be judged for what we **didn't** do - just as we will for the things we **did** do (**Matt. 25:14-46**).

There is an old saying that states, "*The only thing necessary for evil to exist is for good men to do **nothing**.*" Unfortunately, we are living in a time of horrific change. How long can we simply stand by and do **nothing**? What is it going to take before all Christians join hands and finally say, "**Enough!**"

## Ghosts

In the pre-Vatican II Church, the Holy Spirit was referred to as “*Holy Ghost*” in the liturgy. The term, *ghost*, usually conjures images of ghouls and goblins in popular stories, folklore and Hollywood movies. Unfortunately, many people have become confused as a result.

The word actually comes from the Germanic, “*Geist*”. In Latin, the word is rendered as “*Espritu*”, where we get the word, “*Spirit*”. The only difference between the two words is purely a linguistic one.

As for the popular notion of “*lost*” or “*tortured*” souls wandering the earth aimlessly or the idea of a spirit searching for his or her long-lost love looking is completely *unbiblical*. All who leave this world fall into conformity with the will of God and have been judged (**Heb. 9:27**). Whereas God may allow a spirit to manifest itself to us on earth, it is extremely rare. The manifestation of a spirit is understood *only* with regard to salvation – **not** for the purposes of scaring people or haunting a particular place.

Contrary to Hollywood, the spirits of those who have gone to hell don’t wander the earth appearing to people either because they *can’t*. We see evidence of this from the lips of our Lord Jesus himself when he told the Parable of *Lazarus and the Rich Man* (**Luke 16:19-31**). The Rich man, having gone to hell, begged Abraham to allow him to return to the earth to warn his brothers of his fate. Abraham told him that he could **not** and that if his brothers didn’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they certainly wouldn’t listen to *him*.

**Necromancy**, which is the practice of trying to conjure up the dead for the purposes of revealing information, is strictly prohibited in Scripture. According to the Catechism: “*Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone*” (**2116**).

In other words, trying to communicate with the dead for purposes of gleaning *information* from them is prohibited because it places undue trust them *instead* of God. When we pray to the saints, we are asking for their intercessory prayers – **not** for them to tell us our future. Scary ghost stories in film or around a campfire can be fun – as long as we understand that they are **fiction** and not the normative means of revelation.

# **Some Popular Catholic Myths Part I**

## ***1. Chewing the Holy Eucharist is sinful.***

This is one of the most popular and widespread myths among Catholics. The Church has never taught that we cannot bite down on the Eucharist. As a matter of fact, the Greek word used for consuming the Body of Christ in the **Bread of Life Discourse** in **John 6** is “*Trogo(n)*”. This word describes the way an animal eats – to “*munch or gnaw*”.

Many of us were taught that we had to simply allow the host to dissolve in our mouths and *never* to use our teeth. This teaching may have been due to the attempt by some to stress the reverence we are to have for the Blessed Sacrament. However, in their zeal to emphasize this reverence, the idea that we are not to chew the Host is simply a rule that the Church has *never* officially taught.

## ***2. At Communion, we must receive both the consecrated bread and wine to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.***

The fact of the matter is that Jesus is fully present in both species, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Whether we receive communion in the form of the Host or the Cup – we receive the Lord in His **fullness**.

A person who suffers from a physical aversion to wheat, such as *celiac disease* might be concerned about consuming the Host. Others, who might show a similar concern toward the Precious Blood because of a problem with alcohol needn't worry, either. They are receiving our Lord in His fullness under *either* species.

## ***3. The Pope cannot make mistakes.***

The Doctrine of Papal Infallibility applies to the Pope when he makes formal, binding declarations on matters of faith and morals. The Holy Father is infallible - not *impeccable*, which would imply that that is to say that he cannot err in other matters. He can. Infallibility simply means that he is protected by the Holy Spirit from teaching error on doctrinal or dogmatic matters – when he makes binding declarations on matters of faith and morals. Jesus promised the Church that the Holy Spirit would guide her to **ALL** truth (**John 16:12-15**).

## **The Gate is Narrow**

The Church's teaching on Hell is arguably the most disturbing and frightening of all of her doctrines. In fact, it is so unthinkable that many heretical groups have virtually done away with it. The Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarian-Universalists, Christadelphians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, New Agers and others have all watered down the reality of Hell so that it has ceased to be a threatening prospect. Many other mainstream Evangelical Protestant sects have also taken to this *homogenized* version of eternal punishment. They teach that those who do not enter heaven will simply be destroyed and will cease to exist. However, the Bible tells us an entirely different story about Hell. In numerous passages, the reality that Hell is and *eternal* punishment for the wicked is what we read.

**Isaiah 33:11, 14, Matt. 26:24, Matt. 25:31-34, 41, 46, Mark 9:47-48, Luke 3:16-17, 2 Thess. 1:6-9, Rev. 14:11** all speak of the ETERNAL certainty of Hell. In **Mark 9:47-48** Jesus issues this warning: *"It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."*

In **Matt. 7:13-14**, He also warned that *most* people will wind up in Hell: *"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* Several saints who were given prophetic visions of Hell stated that *most* people wound up there.

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** tells us: *"Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, eternal fire."* (CCC 1035).

So many people think that since God knows that they are basically "good people", they will probably go to heaven. The Bible doesn't say that. In fact, it says the exact opposite. Jesus stated that **NONE** of us are good (**Luke 10:18**) – and that's because we haven't yet been made perfect. Without obedience to Christ, we cannot hope to enter into Heaven – which leaves only the prospect of Hell. This is why, in **Phi. 2:12**, St. Paul warns us to *"continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."* The fear of an eternity in Hell should snap us out of our worldly complacency every bit as much as the hope of eternity in Heaven. It should shake us down to our very foundations as Christians.

Going to church on Christmas and Easter is not enough – nor is attending Mass every Sunday. If we aren't *living* our faith (**Matt. 25:31-46, James 1:22**) and carrying our cross daily (**Luke 9:23**), we are not followers of Christ. If we vote for people who proliferate the horror of abortion, euthanasia, homosexual "marriage", embryonic stem cell research and many other abominations, we cannot claim to be Christian. We are instead, just like those who have watered down His teachings to resemble **OUR** will – not **HIS**.

## **Baptism - A Catholic response** *a Catholic response to Protestant objections)*

The Baptism of infants is an Apostolic Tradition that goes all the way back to the Bible, regardless of what some may have you believe. As you will read, the Early Church knew from the beginning that Baptism was more than a mere symbol but that it was a Sacrament of regeneration in which the baptized person was spiritually reborn.

St. Paul compares Baptism in the New Covenant with Circumcision in the Old Covenant. When infants were circumcised in the Old Covenant, it was done so by the faith of their parents to raise the child in accordance with the Laws of the Jewish faith. Likewise, the Catholic Church teaches that infant Baptism in the New Covenant is done so by the faith of the parents to raise the child according to the Church.

Many Protestants claim that circumcision was meant to be nothing more than a sign and a seal – again – simply an *outward* symbol of the inward reality of faith. Likewise, the classic Protestant position on Baptism is that it is merely an outward symbol of the inward reality of faith. Infant Baptism is rejected by many, though accepted by some. Unfortunately for them, the Bible tells us that Baptism is **necessary** for salvation.

When Jesus was commissioning the Apostles before ascending into heaven, He told them emphatically, “Whoever believes **and is baptized** will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned” (**Mark 6:16**). He couldn’t have made this any clearer.

As indicated, St. Paul uses the terms, “*circumcision of the heart*” and the “*circumcision of Christ*” (**Romans 2:29, Col. 2:12-17**) to describe the reality of circumcision being a spiritually inward act, not merely an outward sign. The Old Testament type that **was** circumcision is **now** baptism. And, whereas, circumcision was only applied to **male** Jews – baptism applies to **ALL** in the Christian family.

Baptism was foretold in the Old Testament. **Ezekiel 36:25** states, “*I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.*”

When Nicodemus asked Jesus how a person is born again, he replied, “*Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit*” (**John 3:5**). The importance of the effects of Baptism is echoed by St. Peter in **1 Peter 3:21**, in which he speaks of the 8 people in Noah’s Ark who were saved through water. He goes on to say, “*This prefigured baptism, which saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*”

When St. Peter baptized Cornelius the Centurion, he baptized his **entire** household including children and servants (**Acts 10:1-49, 11:13-14**). We see the same thing in **Acts 16:23-24** with the household of the Philippian jailer and **1 Cor. 1:16** with Stephanas’ household. The plain fact is that households include children of all ages, **including** infants.

To distance themselves with the historic Catholic position as stated in **John 3:5**, some Protestant scholars have gone so far as to say that Jesus was speaking of the **amniotic fluid** in the mother’s womb when he said we must be “*born of water and Spirit.*” The problem with this claim is that **ALL** of us were in the womb of our mother at one time but not all are born **again**.

When the disciples rebuked the children from approaching Jesus, He told them “*Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.*” (**Matt 19:14, Luke 18:16**). Those who would keep the Sacrament of Baptism from infants are doing **precisely** what Christ himself disapproved of.

Just as with the Old Covenant and circumcision, the faith of the parents/guardians will guide the baptized child in the faith with the help of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant.

### **Early Church Teachings on Baptism**

One needs to look no further than the writings of the Early Church on the matter to see the Apostolic teachings and Traditions carried on by the historic Christian faith regarding the Baptism of infants:

#### **Irenaeus**

"He [Jesus] came to save all through himself; all, I say, who through him are reborn in God: **infants, and children, and youths, and old men**. Therefore he passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age . . . [so that] he might be the perfect teacher in all things, perfect not only in respect to the setting forth of truth, perfect also in respect to relative age" (*Against Heresies 2:22:4 [A.D. 189]*).

#### **Hippolytus**

"**Baptize first the children**, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, ***let their parents or other relatives speak for them***" (*The Apostolic Tradition 21:16 [A.D. 215]*).

#### **Origen**

"Every soul that is born into flesh is soiled by the filth of wickedness and sin. . . . In the Church, baptism is given for the remission of sins, and, according to the usage of the Church, **baptism is given even to infants**. If there were nothing in infants which required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of baptism would seem superfluous" (*Homilies on Leviticus 8:3 [A.D. 248]*).

"**The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants**. The apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of the divine sacraments, knew there are in everyone innate strains of [original] sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit" (*Commentaries on Romans 5:9 [A.D. 248]*).

#### **Cyprian of Carthage**

"As to what pertains to the case of infants: You [Fidus] said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, that the old law of circumcision must be taken into consideration, and that **you did not think that one should be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day after his birth. In our council it seemed to us far otherwise. No one agreed to the course which you thought should be taken. Rather, we all judge that the mercy and grace of God ought to be denied to no man born**" (*Letters 64:2 [A.D. 253]*).

"If, in the case of the worst sinners and those who formerly sinned much against God, when afterwards they believe, the remission of their sins is granted and no one is held back from baptism and grace, how much more, then, should an infant not be held back, who, having but recently been born, has done no sin, except that, born of the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of that old death from his first being born. For this very reason does he [an infant] approach more easily to receive the remission of sins: because the sins forgiven him are not his own but those of another" (*ibid., 64:5*).

#### **Gregory of Nazianz**

"**Do you have an infant child? Allow sin no opportunity; rather, let the infant be sanctified from childhood**. From his most tender age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Do you fear the seal [of

baptism] because of the weakness of nature? Oh, what a pusillanimous mother and of how little faith!" (*Oration on Holy Baptism 40:7 [A.D. 388]*).

"'Well enough,' some will say, 'for those who ask for baptism, but what do you have to say about **those who are still children, and aware neither of loss nor of grace? Shall we baptize them too?**' Certainly [I respond], if there is any pressing danger. *Better that they be sanctified unaware, than that they depart unsealed and uninitiated*" (*ibid.*, 40:28).

### **John Chrysostom**

"You see how many are the benefits of baptism, and some think its heavenly grace consists only in the remission of sins, but we have enumerated ten honors [it bestows]! *For this reason we baptize even infants*, though they are not defiled by [personal] sins, so that there may be given to them holiness, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ, and that they may be his [Christ's] members" (*Baptismal Catecheses in Augustine, Against Julian 1:6:21 [A.D. 388]*).

### **Augustine**

"What the universal Church holds, not as instituted [invented] by councils but as something always held, is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority. *Since others respond for children, so that the celebration of the sacrament may be complete for them, it is certainly availing to them for their consecration, because they themselves are not able to respond*" (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists 4:24:31 [A.D. 400]*).

"The custom of Mother Church in **baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned, nor is it to be regarded in any way as superfluous, nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic**" (*The Literal Interpretation of Genesis 10:23:39 [A.D. 408]*).

"Cyprian was not issuing a new decree but was keeping to the most solid belief of the Church in order to correct some who thought that infants ought not be baptized before the eighth day after their birth. . . . **He agreed with certain of his fellow bishops that a child is able to be duly baptized as soon as he is born**" (*Letters 166:8:23 [A.D. 412]*).

*By this grace baptized infants too are ingrafted into his [Christ's] body*, infants who certainly are not yet able to imitate anyone. Christ, in whom all are made alive . . . gives also the most hidden grace of his Spirit to believers, *grace which he secretly infuses even into infants*. . . . It is an excellent thing that the Punic [North African] Christians call baptism salvation and the sacrament of Christ's Body nothing else than life. Whence does this derive, except from an ancient and, as I suppose, apostolic tradition, by which the churches of Christ hold inherently that without baptism and participation at the table of the Lord it is impossible for any man to attain either to the kingdom of God or to salvation and life eternal? This is the witness of Scripture, too. . . . If anyone wonders why children born of the baptized should themselves be baptized, let him attend briefly to this. . . . The sacrament of baptism is most assuredly the sacrament of regeneration" (*Forgiveness and the Just Deserts of Sin, and the Baptism of Infants 1:9:10; 1:24:34; 2:27:43 [A.D. 412]*).

### **Council of Carthage V**

"Item: It seemed good that whenever there were not found reliable witnesses who could testify that without any doubt **they [abandoned children] were baptized and when the children themselves were not, on account of their tender age, able to answer concerning the giving of the sacraments to them, all such children should be baptized without scruple**, lest a hesitation should deprive them of the

cleansing of the sacraments. This was urged by the [North African] legates, our brethren, since they redeem many such [abandoned children] from the barbarians" (*Canon 7 [A.D. 401]*).

### **Council of Mileum II**

"[W]hoever says that infants fresh from their mothers' wombs ought not to be baptized, or say that they are indeed baptized unto the remission of sins, but that they draw nothing of the original sin of Adam, which is expiated in the bath of regeneration . . . **let him be anathema [excommunicated]**. Since what the apostle [Paul] says, 'Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so passed to all men, in whom all have sinned' [Rom. 5:12], must not be understood otherwise than the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith even infants, who in themselves thus far have not been able to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized unto the remission of sins, so that that which they have contracted from generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration" (*Canon 3 [A.D. 416]*).

# Confession – A Catholic response

*(A Catholic response to Protestant objections)*

Many Protestants falsely assert that Sacrament of Reconciliation and confessing one's sins to a priest is unbiblical. Their rejection of this Sacrament is based on the notion that there no longer a human priesthood and that Jesus alone is our priest. They base this on certain Biblical text such as **Hebrews 7:22–25**, which says:

*“This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant. The former priests **were many in number**, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but **he holds his priesthood permanently**, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives **to make intercession for them.**”*

This text, they say, abolishes the need for a human priesthood.

Furthermore, they add the following verse to their arsenal of “proof” against the idea of the priesthood: **1 Timothy 2:5**, which says, *“For there is one God, and there is **one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.**”*

Christ, they say is the only mediator and there is no need for any other. Is that so? Let's look at what the following verses have to say about that:

**Peter 2:5–9** says, *“Like living stones **be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.**”*

While Jesus, whose sacrifice on our behalf is eternally present before the Father, is our priest, our intercessor, our mediator before the Father in a special sense – we are **ALL** called to be priests, mediators and intercessors.

St. Paul is emphatic about our intercessory function in **1 Tim. 2:1–2**, when he says, *“First of all, then, I urge that **supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men**, for kings and all who are in high positions.”*

In **1 Cor. 12:12-20**, he tells us that we are all parts of the same Body of Christ that support each other. He says that there should be no disunity among us and goes so far as to say that if one part of the Body suffers, **all** the parts suffer with it. Conversely, if one part is honored, **all** the parts share its joy. That is how *radically* we are joined to the Body of Christ.

It is ironic that Protestants will reject the idea that we can intercede for one another to God, yet they, too will pray for one another and ask each other for prayer. After all, aren't we told in **James 5:16** that *“the fervent prayer of a righteous person is efficacious?”*

The practice of telling our sins directly to a priest is based directly in Scripture. Three times in the Gospels (**Matt. 16:19, 18:18 and John 20:23**), we read where Jesus gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins or to hold them bound. This is not a something that Jesus took lightly. In **John 20:21-23**, Jesus (*who is God*) breathes on the Apostles as he is giving them this power:

*(Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, **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.**"*

The fact that Jesus breathed on the Apostles when entrusted them with this ministry is highly significant because he doesn't do this anywhere else in the New Testament. In fact, there are only *two* times in **ALL** of Scripture where God breathes on man:

The *first* is when he breathed life into Adam. The *second* is here in John's Gospel when he is giving them the power to forgive or retain sins.

Many Protestants will have you believe that Jesus was merely telling them that they now had the power to *recognize* sins – but that is **NOT** what he said (*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained*). The Greek word used here for the word “forgive” is *aphiemi*, which means: *to send away, to send forth, yield up, to expire, to let go, give up a debt, forgive, to remit*.

The practice of confessing your sins to the Church is an ancient one that goes all the way back to the Apostles themselves. We see this in the 1<sup>st</sup> century document, the **Didache** (*The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*), where it emphatically states the necessity of confessing our sins to the Church: “**Confess your sins in Church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . . , On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure**” (**Didache 4:14,14:1 [A.D.70]**).

St. Paul makes no small case for this ministry of reconciliation clearly in **2 Cor. 5:18-20**:

“*And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*”

In **2 Cor. 2:10**, he states, “*Whomever you forgive anything, so do I. **For indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for you in the presence of Christ**.*” It is interesting to note that the Greek word St. Paul uses here for presence is *Prosopo*, which means **Person**. He is telling the Corinthians that he forgave sins in the person of Christ. In Latin, this is called *in persona Christi*.

We must remember, as with all Protestant objections to Catholic Sacraments and Doctrines, their objections came some **1500 years after** the Apostles had spent a lifetime teaching about them, practicing them and handing them down to following generations.

### **Early Church Teachings on Confession**

It is always important to compare the teachings of the Church today with those of the Early Church. The Early Church Fathers have much to say on the topic of Confession and Reconciliation:

#### **Ignatius of Antioch**

For as many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop. *And as many as shall, in the exercise of penance, return into the unity of the Church*, these, too, shall belong to God, that they may live according to Jesus Christ (*Letter to the Philadelphians 3 [A.D. 110]*).

#### **Irenaeus**

[The Gnostic disciples of Marcus] have deluded many women. . . Their consciences have been branded as with a hot iron. *Some of these women make a public confession, but others are ashamed to do this, and in silence, as if withdrawing from themselves the hope of life of God, they either apostatize entirely or hesitate between two courses* (*Against Heresies 1:22 [A.D. 189]*).

#### **Tertullian**

*The Church has the power of forgiving sins*. This I acknowledge and adjudge (Repentance 10:1 [A.D. 203]).

#### **Hippolytus**

(*Regarding ordination of Bishops*) . . .grant this your servant, whom you have chosen for the episcopate, [the power] to feed your holy flock and to serve without blame as your high priest, ministering night and day to propitiate unceasingly before your face and to offer to you the gifts of your holy Church, and by

**the Spirit of the high priesthood to have the authority to forgive sins, in accord with your command** (Apostolic Tradition 3 [A.D. 215]).

### **Origen**

[A filial method of forgiveness], albeit hard and laborious [is] the remission of sins through penance, when the sinner . . . ***does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine***, after the manner of him who say, "I said, to the Lord, I will accuse myself of my iniquity" (Homilies in Leviticus 2:4 [A.D. 248]).

### **John Chrysostom**

Priests have received a power which God has given neither to angels nor to archangels. It was said to them: "*Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose, shall be loosed.*" Temporal rulers have indeed the power of binding: but they can only bind the body. ***Priests, in contrast, can bind with a bond which pertains to the soul itself and transcends the very heavens.*** Did [God] not give them all the powers of heaven? "*Whose sins you shall forgive,*" he says, "*they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.*" The Father has given all judgment to the Son. ***And now I see the Son placing all this power in the hands of men*** [Matt. 10:40; John 20:21-23]. They are raised to this dignity as if they were already gathered up to heaven (*The Priesthood* 3:5 [A.D. 387]).

# Catholic “Inventions” Debunked

The following list of “Catholic Inventions” is taken right out of **Loraine Bottner’s** deeply flawed and defamatory book, “**Roman Catholicism**”. Boettner, a 20<sup>th</sup> century author who was an virulent anti-Catholic, played fast and loose with the facts and dates in his vilifying diatribe against the Church.

The scary thing is that many non-Catholic groups *still* use this bogus list to find fault with the Catholic Church – never investigating the fact that most of its claims are patently false, petty and embarrassingly ignorant. This list or variations of it on can be found on many anti-Catholic websites and literature.

Boettner wanted to cast a negative light on the disciplines introduced by the Catholic Church and doctrines declared. He wanted to show that they were nothing more than man-made “*inventions*” because they were not explicitly taught in the Bible. As you will see, he was dead wrong. The doctrinal and dogmatic decrees made by the Church are Scripturally-based while other matters of discipline were declared to accommodate the needs of the growing worldwide Church. Aside from Boettner’s attacks being false, it is interesting to note that Protestants have also added some of their *own* traditions such as altar calls, individual interpretation of Scripture, the withholding of baptism from infants and Sola Scriptura that have no basis in Scripture.

Below, Boettner’s “inventions” are numbered. The Catholic response is in **blue**.

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## **1. Prayers for the dead**

**A.D. 300**

This is a practice that can be seen as far back in Jewish history as **2 Macc. 12:42-46**. The practice of praying for the dead is still done by Orthodox Jews to this day. The New Testament also refers to a prayer for the dead by St. Paul in **2 Timothy 1:16-18**.

On the Epitaph of Abercius, the Bishop of Hierapolis, he asks all who may read his grave marker to **pray for him**. This was written in 180 AD.

## **2. Making the sign of the cross**

**300**

Where Boettner got this phony date, we may never know, but it is **completely** untrue. Tertullian writes about making the sign of the cross circa, **195 A.D.**: “*In all the occupations of our daily lives, we furrow our foreheads with the Sign of the cross*”. This was already a long-established custom when this was written.

## **3. Wax candles, about**

**320**

Maybe the Church was unaware they were supposed to worship in dark.

Is Boettner serious? Is this really an issue? Light represents joy, goodness and purity, whereas darkness represents sadness, desolation, despair, ignorance and evil. The record of the execution of Cyprian of Carthage in the year 258 mentions the use of **candles** at his funeral.

God created light: “*Then God said 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw how good the light was*” (**Gen. 1:3-4**). God appears before Moses in the burning bush (**Ex. 3:2**). God “*dwells in unapproachable light*” (**1 Tim. 6:16**). God “*... is light and in him there is no darkness*” (**1 John 1:5**). We see that a constant light is kept burning in God’s presence before the Holy of Holies (**Lev. 24:2-4**).

As for the use of candles – there were no electric lights used in churches until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The candle itself is symbolic of Jesus: His flesh – his humanity is symbolized in the pale wax. In the center of the candle, the wick which gives us the light represents his soul. It gives us light until it burns down and is fully consumed, sacrificing itself - representative of the sacrifice Christ himself offered for us.

Beeswax, is the purest and the sweetest and is appropriate for representing the sacred humanity of Christ.

#### 4. Veneration of angels and dead saints, and use of images 375

That's strange – where did he get this date? We have writings from the Fathers citing an already established practice of venerating saints and angels and speak of their intercession from about 150 years *prior* to Boettner's random date of 375.

From the earliest of times, we see the Church recognizing those who have gone before us as prayerful intercessors. The term, “*dead saints*”, is particularly offensive to the Catholic because the Church teaches, as do the Scriptures themselves, that those in heaven are more alive than we are. Although they have left this world, they have been made perfect in the Lord, as nothing unclean can enter heaven *Rev. 21:27*.

*Hebrews 12:1* tells us that we are surrounded by them and that they are “*so great a cloud of witnesses*”.

As for the “use of images” being somehow wrong - this charge is an amazingly ignorant one. Images have been used for various reasons throughout history such as teaching about Biblical events and to remind people of God and those whom he chose to do his will. Anti-Catholics *choose* to forget that in centuries past most of the population was illiterate and learned of these things from images, statues and stories.

God commanded Moses to create and make use of the image of a bronze serpent to cure those who were dying from snake bites (*Numbers 21:7-9*). He also commanded Moses to place 2 golden cherubim atop the Ark (*Ex. 25:18-20*). Images are not necessarily idols.

#### 5. The Mass, as a daily celebration 394

Huh? This claim deserves a resounding, “*Hogwash!*”

If some communities *weren't* celebrating daily mass in the early years of the Church, it was because of persecutions and the masses having to be celebrated in secret. A rudimentary knowledge of history would shed light on that. It's easy for people of today to cast aspersions on the Early Church as if they had all of the freedoms that we enjoy, especially the United States. When the Roman Emperor Constantine finally decriminalized Christianity, they were free to practice their faith and celebrate mass as they wished.

As for daily celebration of mass being a later Catholic “invention”, one need only to appeal to Scripture to find the truth. *Acts 2:46-47* explicitly tells us:

*Every day* they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. These passages suggest a daily Liturgy of the Word in the in the temple area which was followed by a Liturgy of the Eucharist in their homes.

#### 6. Beginning of the exaltation of Mary, the term “Mother of God” first applied to her by the Council of Ephesus 431

Gosh – and we thought the Bible gave us the first exaltations of Mary (*Luke 1:28-29, 42, 45, 48*).

Later, the term, Theotokos (God-Bearer), which was applied to Mary at the 1st Council of Ephesus in 431, was used to describe the nature of Jesus in response to the *Nestorian Heresy*, which held that Jesus was not divine. The Early Church always considered Mary to be the Mother of God from the earliest of times.

We see this in the writings of Early Fathers such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Gregory the Wonderworker, Peter of Alexandria, Methodius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephraim, Athanasius, Epiphanius, Ambrose of Milan, Gregory of Nazianz and Jerome.

#### 7. Priests began to dress differently from laymen 500

Maybe it's because people wanted to be able to tell them apart from the congregation.

And this is important *because* . . .? This is really a non-issue because the very same can be said of the many Protestant denominations whose ministers wear robes, collars or other vestments for their services.

This is nothing more than petty anti-Catholicism in its purest form. Priestly vestments symbolize different seasons of the liturgical year.

#### 8. Extreme Unction 526

Are we supposed to disregard the sick and dying? More silliness from those whose sole purpose, it seems, is to defame the Catholic Church.

What Boettner *doesn't* mention is that the Church practice of Extreme Unction (Anointing of the Sick) is derived straight from the Bible itself. It didn't begin in 526, as he would have you believe:

*"Is one of you sick? Let him send for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Lord's name. Prayer offered in faith will restore the sick man, and the Lord will give him relief; if he is guilty of sins, they will be pardoned" (James 5:14-15). Mark 6:13* tells us that the apostles, having been sent out by Jesus, drove out demons and cured the sick by *anointing* them.

Incidentally, this is a practice that is being resurrected by many Evangelical sects today. Strange how this Catholic "invention" is one that is now being practiced by the very groups that chastised the Church for using it in the first place . . .

#### **9. The doctrine of Purgatory, established by Gregory I 593**

Were we supposed to keep this a secret?

As you will see in many other issues brought up by Boettner, a declaration or decree of a Catholic belief does NOT mean that it was "*invented*" at that particular time. The belief in Purgatory has been believed and written about since the dawn of the Church. One need only open up the Bible and read the following Scripture verses that support the idea of final purgation before entry into heaven to see where the Early Church got their ideas: *Matt. 5:25-26, Matt. 12:32, Matt. 18:32-35, Luke 12:58-59, 1 Cor. 3:12-15.*

Along with the Scriptures, Early Church writings from such giants of the early Christianity faith like *Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan and Augustine* support the Catholic position that this was *always* a belief of the Church.

#### **10. Latin Language, used in prayer and worship, imposed by Gregory I 600**

Maybe Chinese didn't seem like the appropriate choice at the time.

Why is this an issue? No matter which language the Church may have chosen as its official language, Boettner would have had a problem with it. This is yet another of the many non-issues you will read on his list.

Latin *was* used in prayer and worship in the year 600. As Christianity spread further West, Latin was the lingua franca and it made sense to adopt it as the official language of the Church. There is nothing sinister about the Church's use of Latin as it was the vernacular of the time. Latin is still the Church's official language – and it is no more mysterious or sinister today than it was in the Early Church. To imply otherwise is to display an abject ignorance of history.

#### **11. Prayers directed to Mary, dead saints and angels, about 600**

Dead? Since when does "*eternal life*" equate to "*dead*"?

Here we go again with the term, "dead saints". Does Boettner really think that those in heaven are dead? This is a stretch – even for the most virulent anti-Catholic. The writings of the Early Church are replete with examples of the Church Fathers praying to – and recommending intercessory prayer to the Christians who died before them and petitioning their help – just as we are to pray for and ask for prayer from members of the Body of Christ here on earth. The word, "*pray*" simply means "*to implore*" or "*to make a request.*" Those who would exclude these brothers and sisters are literally rejecting the Body of Christ. The Early Church *truly* understood that those who have gone before us are no less members of that Body than those of us on earth.

Some examples of this can be seen in the writings of *Origen Cyprian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hilary of Poitiers, Ephraem of Syria, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, Augustine and Jerome* – ALL of whom echoed the Scriptures on the matter of praying and interceding for one another (*1 Tim. 2:1-3, 2 Cor. 1:6, Jas. 5:16, 1 Pet. 2:5-9, Rev. 5:8, 8:3-4*).

Isn't it interesting to note that these authors *ALL* lived and wrote *centuries* before this bogus time frame of 600 A.D.?

#### **12. Title of pope, or universal bishop, given to Boniface III, by emperor Phocas 607**

607, eh?

First of all, the Bishop of Rome was always considered to be Head of the entire Church, as we find in the writings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Father, Ignatius, as well as Hermas, Dionysius, Hegesippus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, and others. Secondly, Tertullian, writing in the **early 3rd Century** who cited, "*...a pontiff--sovereign, of course---that is, a bishop of bishops.*"

Bishop of Rome, or, "Pontifex Maximus", means "bridge-builder", a name which was inherited from governmental functionaries of the pagan Romans. This was *long* before **607**.

As for the word, "Pope" - it simply means "*Papa*", or "*Father*". St. Stephen refers to "*our father Abraham*," in **Acts 7:2**. In **Romans 9:10**, St. Paul speaks of "*our father Isaac*". In **1 Cor. 4:14-15**, he states, "*For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" This is a term of affection, not a biological recognition or one of worship.

**13. Kissing of the pope's foot, began with pope Constantine** **709**

Actually – this practice began *much* earlier than the 8<sup>th</sup> century. When Leo IV was elected in 847, it was spoken of as having been a very "ancient practice". The Emperor Justin paid this respect to Pope John I in 523-26. This is not a requirement by all but an ancient tradition observed in papal enclaves and liturgically in papal masses by Latin and Greek subdeacons.

**14. Temporal power of the popes, conferred by Pipin, king of the Franks** **750**

Umm, time for *another* history lesson.

In 750, Pepin the Short had positioned himself to take charge of the Frankish kingdoms. Since he had been educated by Catholic monks and knew St. Boniface, Pepin asked Pope Zacharias for advice as to whether or not he should take control of the kingdom or not. Pope Zacharias told Pepin that since he held de facto power over the Franks, it was better for all that he take control.

When we study the facts, it becomes clear that Boettner again had his "*facts*" jumbled. Pepin never conferred temporal power on the Pope – it was the *Pope* who confirmed the temporal power of Pepin.

**15. Worship of the cross, images, and relics, authorized** **786**

Boy, talk about your anti-Catholic *whoppers!* Catholics do not now, nor have we *ever* worshipped any object as this would make us guilty of the sin of idolatry. Images and relics are simply reminders of Christ and his devoted followers. We *venerate* them – we do not *worship* them. Veneration simply means to regard something or some one with reverential respect or with admiring deference. A picture of a loved one kept in a wallet is also a *reminder* of that person – but it does not equal worship.

**16. Holy water mixed with a pinch of salt and blessed by a priest** **850**

Would Boettner have preferred a pinch of cayenne pepper instead?

It's interesting to note that the 5<sup>th</sup> Century document, *Apostolic Constitutions*, credits the use of holy water to St. Matthew. Furthermore, two other ancient documents, the Pontifical of Serapion of Thmuis and the *Testamentum Domini* give liturgical formula for blessing oil – *as well as water* at Mass.

**17. Worship of St. Joseph** **890**

*St. Joseph?* I thought we worshipped *Mary* . . .

Seriously, though - the Catholic worships God alone and nobody else. Having raised Jesus from a baby, St. Joseph is looked upon as a great example of Christian faith. Whereas, he is venerated, worship of him or ANY person other than God has always been strictly prohibited by the Church.

**18. College of cardinals established** **927**

Perhaps the Church thought college was a logical step after graduating high school?

Seriously, this is yet another non-issue. Boettner's idea that the Church should not grow from an acorn to an oak is reason alone to question his list. The Church is a living, breathing organism that will grow over time as any healthy body will.

It was at the Council of Rome in 499 AD that Pope Symmachus divided the City into various parochial components, with each under the jurisdiction of a priest known as a "cardinale". A constitution by Pope John VIII published between 873 and 882 specifically mentions these cardinal priests, or *presbyteri cardinales* [34].

A *college* is merely a group of individuals engaged in a common goal or interest. This is yet another example of the petty nature of Boettner's list.

**19. Baptism of bells, instituted by pope John XIII 965**

Maybe this just sounded like a better idea than "*Baptism of the Kazoos*".

This is nothing more than Boettner's anti-Catholicism run amok. It was simply *referred* to as a "*Baptism of Bells*" – it wasn't an **actual** Christian Baptism. Inanimate objects *cannot* be truly baptized and don't have a soul.

The ceremony was a blessing by the Bishop of the bells to be plated in the church bell tower. The bells were then given symbolic names – they were not welcomed into the Body of Christ as members. A blessing of this sort is simply a dedication of an object for a sacred purpose - similar to when a Protestant church is dedicated. Don't most Protestant churches have names? For centuries, ships have been doused with liquid, blessed and given names yet nobody objects to *this* practice.

**20. Canonization of dead saints, first by pope John XV 995**

Here we go again with the "*dead saints*" slur. This is deceptive claim meant to confuse the reader.

Early Christians honored Christians who had died before them and prayerfully asked them for intercession as early as the end of the first century. This is contrary to the belief of many people that the Church set-up this practice later in its existence. The first saints were those who had given up their lives for their Faith, martyrs.

Whereas, it is true that the Catholic Church began applying a standard of holiness of life to some people who lived exemplary Christian lives and through prayer and investigation have declared that the individual is in heaven, we see that the martyrs were always considered saints from the beginning.

**21. Fasting on Fridays and during lent 998**

Now, this is a stretch – even for Boettner.

As far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, we read in the Didache about fasting on Fridays. As far as fasting during Lent, Athanasius writes about it in his *Festal Letters* of 331 AD. In *The Apostolic Canons*, a document written around 340, we read the admonishment to the clergy and the laity to fast during Lent.

A rudimentary look at history renders Boettner's date of 998 as nothing but a *fairytale*.

**22. The Mass, developed gradually as a sacrifice, attendance made obligatory in the 11th century**

*Gradually?* Well, it did take about 50 years after the death of the Apostle John before we see the first writing that mentions of it, but that's a far cry from the 1079 years that Boettner claims.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century document, the The Didache (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*), we read that Christians should assemble on the Lord's Day for the Eucharist. It also mentions that they should confess their sins before receiving the Eucharist so that their "*sacrifice may be a pure one*". However, this was already an established practice because we see that 1<sup>st</sup> Century Father, Ignatius also speaks of this sacrifice, as does Irenaeus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. At any rate – they all seem to speak of the Sacrifice of the Mass almost 1000 years before Boettner's fictitious time frame.

**23. Celibacy of the priesthood, decreed by pope Gregory VII 1079**

"Why does this bother Boettner? Nobody is asking *him* to be celibate.

What Boettner, and others who are threatened by the idea of priestly celibacy need to remember is that this is a **discipline** – *not* a doctrine - nor, is it unbiblical.

Some of the Apostles themselves were said to be married, including St. Peter. But, this doesn't detract from the discipline of priestly celibacy that St. Paul recommended in *1 Cor. 7:7-9, 28, 32-33*. In those verses he states that celibacy was a more perfect state because the married man is anxious about worldly affairs and how to please his wife, whereas the celibate man (*himself included*) could focus on how to please the Lord.

Many of the Early Fathers, including Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and Epiphanius also favored celibacy. But at the local Council of Elvira (Spain) (295-302 AD) celibacy was first imposed on bishops, priests, and deacons. The bottom line is that *nobody* is forced to become a priest, ergo, no Catholic is forced to be celibate. Those who enter the religious life know very well in advance that this discipline is expected of them.

#### **24. The Rosary, mechanical praying with beads, invented by Peter the Hermit 1090**

What is “mechanical” prayer? Does he mean “robotic” or is it just another term to infuse the reader with disdain for the Church?

The Rosary is anything but “mechanical”. It is a Biblically-based intercessory prayer that reflects on various events in the life of Christ. Secondly, its origin is traditionally associated with St. Dominic and was not “invented” by Peter the Hermit. Lastly, the anti-Catholic will usually point to *Matthew 6:5-6* where Jesus condemns repetitious prayer. However, the Rosary does not fall into that category because Jesus was deriding the pagan practice of babbling prayer.

One example of this can be found in *1 Kings 18:26-29* where the pagan prophets on Mount Carmel tried to invoke Baal all day long, repeatedly calling on his name and performing ritual dances. Jesus *wasn't* condemning all repetitious prayer as He Himself engaged in repetitive prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed the same prayer *three times* in a row (*Matt. 26:39-44*). Those in heaven would also be guilty of this because, as *Rev. 4:8* tells us, they repeat the same thing without ceasing day and night.

Nowhere does the Catholic Church downplay the importance of marriage nor does it see marriage as any less of a vocation than the religious life. On the contrary, the Church upholds the sanctity of marriage and holds it to a higher standard than any Protestant denomination. This is evident by the Church's doctrines regarding marriage and its indissolubility.

#### **25. The Inquisition, instituted by the Council of Verona 1184**

There was a Council of Verona? Perhaps, Boettner meant, *Synod* of Verona.

Gregory IX established the first Papal Inquisition in 1233 to investigate the Waldensian heresy as well as the Albigensian heresy. The Synod of Vereona called for severe measures against the Waldensians, Cathari and Arnoldists and was a joint effort of both Pope Lucius III and Emperor Frederick I; however, it was *hardly* an Inquisition, as Boettner asserts.

#### **26. Sale of Indulgences 1190**

Indulgences have never been “sold” by the Church. This is one of those urban myths that has grown over time – with the help of people like Boettner and other anti-Catholics.

In fact, the Council of Trent issued some severe reforms regarding the practice of granting indulgences. Because of previous abuses by some individuals, “in 1567 Pope Pius V canceled all grants of indulgences involving any fees or other financial transactions” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*). This illustrated the Church's seriousness about stopping abuses from indulgences. This fictitious date of **1190** only serves to further expose Boettner's bogus list.

#### **27. Transubstantiation, proclaimed by pope Innocent III 1215**

The only word that comes to mind here is, “*Poppycock.*”

This is one of the most deceitful claims on Boettner's list. A declaration or decree of a Christian belief does NOT mean that it was “invented” at that particular time. If that were so, ALL of the creeds would be considered, “inventions”. The belief in Transubstantiation is derived from *John 6*, where Jesus instructed his disciples to eat his flesh and drink his blood. At the Last Supper, he showed them the *means* by which this was to be done (with bread and wine).

In *1 Corinthians 11:27-29*, St. Paul warns us:

*“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.” A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.”*

That’s a pretty harsh warning – *if* it were only a symbol as most non-Catholics believe, which it is *not*. As for Transubstantiation - the only thing “*new*” about at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 was the term assigned to what was always believed - “*Transubstantiation*”. As for the word itself, it was first used by the theologians Magister Roland about 1150, Stephen of Tournai about 1160, and Peter Comestor about 1170.

We see that the Early Church *vehemently* believed in this doctrine in the writings of the Fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch, a student of John the Apostle, when speaking of the heretics who rejected this belief:

*“They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes. (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:1 [A.D. 110]).”*

At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, Tertullian wrote *“He took bread, offered it to His disciples and made it into His body by saying, ‘This is My body’”* (Against Marcion 212 AD);

About 140 years later, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote, *“Once at Cana in Galilee by a mere nod He changed later into wine; should it now be incredible that He changes wine into blood?”* (Catechetical Lectures [Mystagogic], 350 AD) [55].

## **28. Auricular (out loud) Confession of sins to a priest instead of to God, instituted by pope Innocent III in Lateral council 1215**

Oh, *really?* Well, the Bible shows that this is a doctrine that goes all the way back to the beginning.

First of all, Jesus gave the Church the authority to forgive or retain sins – and that this would be upheld on earth and in heaven (*Matt. 16:15, Matt. 18: 15-18, John 20:21-23*).

*2 Cor. 5:18-20* explicitly refers to the sacrament of Reconciliation:

*“And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

Similarly, *2 Cor. 2:10-11* states: *“Whomever you forgive anything, so do I. For indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for you in the presence of Christ, so that we might not be taken advantage of by Satan, for we are not unaware of his purposes.”* In about 244, Origen speaks of the sinner who “*does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord”*. A few years later, Cyprian of Carthage stated, *“Finally, of how much greater faith and more salutary fear are they who...confess to the priests of God in a straightforward manner and in sorrow, making an open declaration of conscience.”* (C&F p.43)

Again, the anti-Catholic *refuses* to understand that simply because something is declared or reiterated. It does NOT mean that it wasn’t a practice of the Early Church. It is something that is being officially declared usually because of a controversy or heresy. A perfect example of this is the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union of Jesus, declared at the 1<sup>st</sup> Council of Ephesus in 431. 1215, *indeed...*

## **29. Adoration of the wafer (Host), decreed by pope Honorius III 1220**

This claim is almost comical, if not so tragically ignorant. It implies that Catholics worship a piece of bread and a cup of wine. This is misleading and dishonest. We worship Jesus and believe that the bread and wine are transformed into his body and blood. From the earliest writings of the Church we see the Eucharist was believed to be the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Again, at the beginning of the 2nd century, Ignatius of Antioch – student of St. John the Apostle, wrote about the heretics of his time who rejected this belief:

*“They (the heretics) abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness,*

raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes (**Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:1 [A.D. 110]**).”

In his Epistle to the Romans (110 AD), he wrote *"I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ...and for drink I desire His Blood"* [59].

Contrary to what many Protestants believe – the Eucharist is by no means a mere symbol. Jesus Himself declared it to be His Flesh and Blood, indeed, His Body (**Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:19-20, John 6:51-58**).

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## Epilogue

Many Protestant ministers tell their congregations that the Church today should resemble the Early Church.

*"If your church does not look like the early church of the bible",* they say, *"then you're in the wrong church."*, they say. You might even hear this from Pastors of some of the many "mega-churches" that exist today which, ironically, look **nothing** like the early Church.

The Catholic Church, having been instituted by Jesus Christ himself and not by mere men, understands that when Jesus commissioned his Apostles to *"make disciples of all nations"* (**Matt. 28:19-20**), the Church would change from that point forward. It would continue to grow from the acorn to the oak – the mustard seed to the mustard plant (**Mark 4:30-34**) - because it is the living Body of Christ. So, if it looks the same as the Church of the bible – then it never grew and its fruits have dried up.

The Church is not a large, worldwide conglomeration of constantly splintering sects with differing doctrines and traditions. This is **not** the unity that Jesus prayed for so fervently in **John 16**. The Church is the united Body of Christ that is truly One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. It is the **only** Church instituted by Jesus Christ and can trace every one of its bishops, doctrines and traditions back to the Early Church of the Bible. Every single Protestant denomination can only trace its origins as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

If you're not part of the only Church instituted by Christ, then you should ask yourself:

*"If **my** church **wasn't** instituted by Jesus, then who started it?"*

*"Why am I **not** part of the Church instituted by Christ?"*

# The Eucharist – A Catholic Response

*(A Catholic response to Protestant objections)*

The Holy Eucharist - that is, what Catholics believe to be the body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ - is a subject that sharply divides Catholics and Protestants. Whereas, some denominations believe in varying degrees of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, most flatly deny this doctrine, rendering it mere symbol.

In **1 Corinthians 11:27-30**, Paul speaks to the reality of the Eucharist and the *severity* of the consequences to those who take this lightly: *“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily **will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord**. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, **eats and drinks judgment on himself**. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying.”*

This is pretty harsh language for something that Protestants claim is only a *symbol*.

This directly correlates to the Bread of Life discourse in **John 6**, where Jesus stated in no uncertain terms: *“Amen, amen, I say to you, **unless you eat** the flesh of the Son of Man **and drink** his blood, **you do not have life within you**.”*

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is **true food**, and my blood is **true drink**. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”*

It is interesting to note that the usual Greek word used for human eating is *“phagon”*, however, this is not the word used in these passages. St. John uses the word, *“trogon”*, which means, to munch or to gnaw - *like an animal*. Jesus was again using *hyperbole* as he often did to drive his point across so that the crowd would understand that he was not speaking metaphorically. He **meant** what he said.

Just as the Paschal Lamb was to be eaten, it is also true for the **Lamb of God**.

In verse **60**, his disciples said, *“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”*

Did Jesus explain what he *“really”* meant? No, he said: *“Does this shock you?”* He *knew* that some would not believe because they didn't have true faith from the Father.

Protestants often cite what Jesus said next in **John 6:63** as proof that Jesus was speaking symbolically and not literally when he said, *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”* Is that so? Let's examine this claim.

Since when does spirit mean symbolic or metaphoric? To fully understand this verse, we must go back to verses **29** and **44-45**:

Jesus answered and said to them, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.”* (v. **29**). *“**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day**.”*

*It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.”* (v. **44-45**).

We must also read the verses immediately following verse **63 (64-65)**: *“But there are some of you who do not believe.” Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that **no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father**.”*

Here, Jesus is telling them that unless we are drawn to him by the Father, we cannot possibly understand him. This is why his followers abandoned him and returned to their former way of life in verse **66**. This verse says, “*As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.*”

This marks the **only** time in Scripture where Jesus' disciples left him for doctrinal reasons. They simply couldn't handle what Jesus was telling them.

It is also important to note what happened after this. Did Jesus plead with them or explain that he was speaking “metaphorically” or “symbolically”? **NO**. He turned to the Apostles and said, “*Do you also want to leave?*” Here it is **completely** evident - except to those who refuse to see - that Jesus meant what he said.

Protestants are fond of pointing out that Jesus said, “*...the flesh profits nothing...*” when refuting the Real Presence. They are correct on one count: **OUR** flesh profits us nothing. **BUT** Jesus' flesh profits us **everything**. The sacrifice of his physical body profits us salvation. Would Jesus have told his disciples that **HIS** flesh profits nothing? Absolutely not.

As with **1 Corinthians 11:27-30**, the Bread of Life Discourse in **John 6** speaks to the **reality** of Christ's Presence in the Eucharist. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, we read what is known as the Great Commission, where Jesus instructs the Apostles to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them. In the last line (**Matt. 28:20**) Jesus says, “*...and behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*” This is not simply a symbolic gesture but it points to the reality of his presence in the Eucharist.

It is also important to understand the correlation between the Eucharist and the New Covenant. The new covenant is promised to Jeremiah (**Jer. 31:31**) and is never mentioned again in the Old Testament. In fact, the term does not appear again until the Last Supper when Jesus uses it during the institution of the Holy Eucharist (**Matt. 26-28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20**).

Consider also what our Lord said to St. Peter **after** he had instituted the Eucharist. He said, “*Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers*” (**Luke 22:31**). At the moment of the institution of the First Eucharist, Satan realized that Jesus would remain with his faithful on earth. He then demanded that they be given to him because he could not deal with the fact that although Jesus was going to the Father – he would remain here on earth with his Church. In **John 14:18**, Jesus promised that he would not leave us orphans - and he has stayed true to his word in the Eucharist.

## **Early Church Teachings on the Eucharist**

Belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist (*body, blood, soul and divinity*) was a belief of the historic Christian faith for some 1500 years before the Protestant Reformation. In fact, the early Christians were accused of cannibalism because of this belief and were tortured and put to death because of it. Why was this belief abandoned by some of the Reformers and their successors? Some reasons might include rebellion, spiritual pride and even personal arrogance. Whatever the case may be, they fall into direct opposition with the Historic Christian faith as seen in the writings of the Early Church:

### **Ignatius of Antioch**

Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. . . . **They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again.** They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:1 [A.D. 110]*). . . . and are now ready to obey your bishop and clergy with undivided minds and to share in the one common breaking of bread – the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore (*Letter to the Ephesians 20 [A.D. 110]*).

### **Justin Martyr**

We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [i.e., has received baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these, but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, **the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus** (*First Apology 66 [A.D. 151]*).

### **Irenaeus**

He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies. When, therefore, the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receive the Word of God and become the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported) how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life — flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord and is in fact a member of him? (*Against Heresies 5:2 [A.D. 189]*).

### **Clement of Alexandria**

"Eat my flesh" [Jesus] says, "and drink my blood." The Lord supplies us with these intimate nutrients, he delivers over his flesh and pours out his blood, and nothing is lacking for the growth of his children (*The Instructor of Children 1:6:43:3 [A.D. 191]*).

### **Hippolytus**

"And she [Wisdom] has furnished her table" [Proverbs 9:1] . . . refers to his [Christ's] honored and undefiled body and blood, which day by day are administered and offered sacrificially at the spiritual divine table, as a memorial of that first and ever-memorable table of the spiritual divine supper [i.e., the Last Supper] (*Fragment from Commentary on Proverbs [A.D. 217]*).

### **Aphraahat**

After having spoken thus [at the Last Supper], the Lord rose up from the place where he had made the Passover and had given his body as food and his blood as drink, and he went with his disciples to the

place where he was to be arrested. But he ate of his own body and drank of his own blood, while he was pondering on the dead. *With His own hands the Lord presented his own body to be eaten, and before he was crucified he gave his blood as drink* (*Treatises* 12:6 [A.D. 340]).

### **Cyril of Jerusalem**

The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, *the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ* (*Catechetical Lectures* 19:7 [A.D. 350]).

Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that, for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the body and blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the body and blood of Christ. . . [Since you are] fully convinced that the apparent bread is not bread, even though it is sensible to the taste, but the body of Christ, and that the apparent wine is not wine, even though the taste would have it so. . . partake of that bread as something spiritual, and put a cheerful face on your soul (*ibid.*, 22:6,9).

### **Theodore**

When [Christ] gave the bread he did not say, "This is the symbol of my body" but, "This is my body." In the same way when he gave the cup of his blood he did not say, "This is the symbol of my blood," but, "This is my blood," for he wanted us to look upon the [Eucharistic elements] after their reception of grace and the coming of the Holy Spirit not according to their nature, but receive them as they are, the body and blood of our Lord. We ought . . . not regard [the elements] merely as bread and cup) but as the body and blood of the Lord, into which they were transformed by the descent of the Holy Spirit (*Catechetical Homilies* 5:1 [A.D. 405]).

### **Ambrose of Milan**

Perhaps you may be saying, "I see something else; how can you assure me that I am receiving the body of Christ?" It but remains for us to prove it. And how many are the examples we might use! . . . Christ is in that sacrament, because it is the body of Christ (*The Mysteries* 9:50, 58 [A.D. 390]).

### **Augustine**

I promised you [new Christians], who have now been baptized, a sermon in which I would explain the sacrament of the Lord's table, which you now look upon and of which you last night were made participants. You ought to know that you have received what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That bread which you see on the altar having been sanctified by the word of God is the body of Christ, That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ (*Sermons* 227 [A.D. 411]).

What you see is the bread and the chalice, that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ. This has been said very briefly, which may perhaps be sufficient for faith, yet faith does not desire instruction (*ibid.* 272).

# **The Mass – A Catholic Response**

*(A Catholic response to Protestant objections)*

Many Protestants will charge that during the Mass, Catholics re-sacrifice of Christ on the cross. They claim that the Church teaches that Jesus dies often with every Mass – which is in direct contrast with **Rom. 6:9-10** where it says he died only *once*. Finally, they level the charge that Catholicism teaches that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was not sufficient and must be repeated over and over again – that all sacrifices have ceased because of his perfect, once-for-all sacrifice. These allegations all have one thing in common: They are patently *false*.

These falsehoods are simply a misunderstanding of the sacrifice of the Mass, as well as a misrepresentation of the facts. Many articles and books have been written on the subject by Protestant authors – none more quoted than **Loraine Boettner's "Roman Catholicism"**. His diatribe against the Catholic Church is filled with one false accusation after another as well as what appears to be an abject ignorance of history and a perversion of Scripture. One should seriously question publications such as these that bear false witness and present a counterfeit version of the truth. One other glaring problem with these charges is they illustrate a rather ignorant approach to the understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven as an eternal state.

First of all, to understand Christ's sacrifice on the cross we must first try to understand the concept of eternity. God is outside of time. There is no past or future with God – everything is in the eternal *now*.

When the authors of the Bible wrote to the early Church about God, they wrote in terms that humans could understand. These terminologies that apply human traits to God are called *anthropomorphisms*. For instance, in regard to the parting of the sea in **Exodus 15:8** we read, "*By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up.*" We know that God is spirit and has no nostrils but this is the way it is conveyed to us so that we can understand. **1 Sam. 15:35** tells us that God "*regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.*" God has no regrets because he doesn't make errors but this is a way for the reader to come to an understanding of the Creator.

The Holy Spirit, through the human instruments he used to write the Scriptures, sometimes used simple words and phrases to convey to mere humans what God was saying.

In the same way, we are told in **Luke 23:43** that Jesus said to penitent criminal on the cross next to him, "*Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*" Are we to assume that Jesus would be in heaven on that Friday with the criminal? **1 Pet. 3:19** emphatically states that after his death, Jesus "*...also went to preach to the spirits in prison.*" We also read in **John 20:17**, *Jesus said to her (Mary Magdalene), "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'*"

Finally, **2 Pet. 3:8** tells us about the reality of eternity when he writes, "*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day.*"

When Jesus told the thief that *today* he would be with him in Paradise – he was speaking in the *eternal* sense.

It is with this rudimentary understanding of the concept of eternity that we can begin to comprehend the meaning of **Rev. 13:8**, when it tells us that Christ was crucified *before the foundation of the world*. His is an eternal sacrifice. **Revelation 5:6** says, "*And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.*"

In God's eyes, Jesus is crucified *before* the foundation of the world and **ever-present** as a sacrifice before him now. Jesus is neither “*re-sacrificed*” nor does he “*die often*” in the Mass as is falsely charged. The Church recognizes that God is eternal and is not confined by the restraints of time as we are. As the Scriptures state, Jesus was *always* our Paschal Lamb - the perfect sacrifice, the propitiation for our sins.

The “*unbloody sacrifice*” that is referred to means that Jesus is *not* killed again and does *not* spill his blood repeatedly. His blood was shed for us on Calvary - not in every single Catholic Church around the world. The Mass represents - and is a celebration of his eternal sacrifice for our sins.

There is no contradiction between Scripture and what the Catholic Church has practiced from the very beginning in the 1st century. The doctrines of the Church as they pertain to *the Mass* (**Acts 2:46-47, 1 Cor. 10:16**), *the Eucharist* (**Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:19-20, John 6:29-71, 1 Cor. 11:27-30**), *Confession* (**Matt. 16:15, Matt. 18: 15-18, John 20:21-23, 2:Cor. 2:10, 5:18-20**), *Baptism* (**Ezk. 36:25-28, Acts 2:37-38, Acts 10:48, John 3:5, Mark 16:16, Eph. 4:5**) and so on, are well-documented in the Bible as well as in the writings of the Early Church Fathers from the 1<sup>st</sup> century on.

The verses cited as “evidence” against the sacrifice of the Mass, including **Heb. 7:27-28, 9:11-12, 9:24-26, 28, 10:10-14, 18** and **Romans 6:9-10** speak to a useless *re-sacrifice* presented by flawed human beings who aim to put him to death again. The Mass is anything but that as it represents Jesus’ perfect sacrifice that is presented to God as an eternal propitiation for sin.

The **Book of Revelation** is filled with similarities between Mass on earth and that of the heavenly liturgy. Here is a list of some of them:

**Rev. 1:10** speaks of the heavenly liturgy being celebrated on the Lord's day. Catholics are obliged to attend mass on Sunday (the Lord’s Day).

**Rev. 1:12, 2:5** speaks of lampstands or “*Menorahs*” in heaven. They are also used in the mass here on earth.

**Rev. 1:13, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 15:6, 19:13-14** tells us about priests wearing special vestments in the heavenly liturgy. Here on earth, Catholic priests also wear liturgical vestments when celebrating Mass.

**Rev. 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3; 16:11** speaks of a penitential rite going on in heaven – just like the in the Mass on earth.

**Rev. 15:3-4** speaks of the “*Gloria*” being recited in heaven. You will hear this recited during the Mass on earth.

**Rev. 4:4, 5:14; 11:16, 14:3, 19:4** mentions the *presbuteros(oi)* (*priests*) in heaven. On earth, the priest offers Jesus’ eternal and ongoing sacrifice during the Mass.

**Rev. 5:8, 6:9-11, 8:3-4** speaks of the saints in heaven interceding on our behalf – just as they are petitioned in the Mass.

**Rev. 4:8** speaks of heaven's un-ending hymn of praise to God, “*Holy, Holy, Holy*”. This very same prayer is recited in the Mass.

**Rev. 2:17** speaks of manna in heaven that is given to the faithful. Likewise, during the Mass, we receive the true manna - the Eucharist.

**Rev. 5:8, 8:3-4** speaks of incense being used in heaven which has been part of the celebration of the Mass from the beginning.

**Rev. 6:9** tells us about the martyrs under the heavenly altar which is mirrored by the Church's tradition of having relics of saints under the altars of our churches on earth.

**Rev. 5** speaks of the Lamb (describing Jesus). During the Mass, Jesus is described as the *Lamb of God* during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

**Rev. 8:3, 11:1, 14:18, 16:7** speaks of an altar being present in heaven – which illustrates that an eternal sacrifice is being offered. That sacrifice is the very same one being offered on the altar during the Mass.

**Rev. 14:4** speaks of those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They are celibate. In the same way, our celibate priests and religious here on earth follow the Lord.

**Rev. 15:7, 16:1-4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 21:9** speaks of chalices (bowls) being used in the heavenly liturgy. Likewise, chalices are used to offer our Lord's eternal sacrifice on earth during the Mass.

**Rev. 17, 19:9** speaks of consuming the Lamb at the marriage celebration in Heaven. This is done at every single Mass on earth during Communion.

**Rev. 19:1, 3, 4, 6** speaks of the “*Alleluia*” being recited in heaven. You will find this recited at every Mass here on earth.

Finally, in **Rev. 5:14; 7:12; 19:4**, we read that heaven's concluding liturgical prayer “*Amen*” is the very one that is recited at the end of the Mass on earth.

Most reputable Protestant theologians will agree that the Catholic Church was established by Jesus, although they may have a problem with the name “*Catholic*”. Where they depart from this fact is when they claim that the Church went into apostasy some later point (*most say the 4<sup>th</sup> century*). Many of them claim that a faithful, “*invisible remnant*” carried the faith through the years that the “*corrupt Church*” was in charge. They claim that the Reformation was the manifestation of this invisible remnant coming to the forefront. Others say that the Church ceased to exist in God's eyes until it was revived during the Reformation. These claims would render Jesus a liar because he assured Peter and the Apostles in **Matt. 16:18** that the gates of hell would *not* prevail against his Church. This would also mean that nobody was saved (except for the invisible remnant) from about the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the 16<sup>th</sup> century - a claim which is not only preposterous but extremely arrogant, given the fact that they can offer no proof for this myth.

### **Early Church Teachings on the Mass**

From the 1<sup>st</sup> Century on, we see that Mass was being celebrated by the Early Church. Protestant charges that the Mass developed over the centuries are rendered null and void by the testimonies of the Early Church Fathers themselves:

#### **The Didache (*Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*)**

Assemble on the Lord's Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist: but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until he has been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice [Matt. 5:23—24]. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, “Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations.” [Mal. 1:11, 14] (*Didache 14 [A.D. 70]*).

#### **Clement 1**

Our sin will not be small if we eject from the episcopate those who blamelessly and holily have offered its sacrifices. Blessed are those presbyters who have already finished their course, and who have obtained a fruitful and perfect release.

*(Letter to the Corinthians 44:4-5 [A.D. 80]).*

### **Ignatius of Antioch**

Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist; for there is but one body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with his blood, and one single altar of sacrifice—even as there is also but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow servitors, the deacons. This will ensure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of God.

*(Letter to the Philadelphians 4 [A.D. 110]).*

### **Justin Martyr**

God speaks by the mouth of Malachi, one of the twelve [minor prophets], as I said before, about the sacrifices at that time presented by you: "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord, and I will not accept your sacrifices at your hands; for from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, my name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles" [Mal. 1:10-11]. He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us [Christians] who in every place offer sacrifices to him, that is, the bread of the Eucharist and also the cup of the Eucharist.

*(Dialogue with Trypho 41 [A.D. 155]).*

### **Irenaeus**

He took from among creation that which is bread, and gave thanks, saying, "This is my body." The cup likewise, which is from among the creation to which we belong, he confessed to be his blood. He taught the new sacrifice of the new covenant, of which Malachi, one of the twelve [minor] prophets, had signified beforehand: "You do not do my will, says the Lord Almighty, and I will not accept a sacrifice at your hands. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice; for great is my name among the Gentiles, says the Lord Almighty" [Mal. 1:10-11]. By these words he makes it plain that the former people will cease to make offerings to God but that in every place sacrifice will be offered to him, and indeed, a pure one, for his name is glorified among the Gentiles.

*(Against Heresies 4:17:5 [A.D. 189]).*

### **Cyprian**

If Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, is himself the high priest of God the Father; and if he offered himself as a sacrifice to the Father; and if he commanded that this be done in commemoration of himself, then certainly the priest, who imitates that which Christ did, truly functions in place of Christ.

*(Letters 63:14 [A.D. 253]).*

### **Serapion**

Accept therewith our hallowing too, as we say, "Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth is full of your glory." Heaven is full, and full is the earth, with your magnificent glory, Lord of virtues. Full also is this sacrifice, with your strength and your communion; for to you we offer this living sacrifice, this unbloody oblation.

*(Prayer of the Eucharistic Sacrifice 13:12-16 [A.D. 350]).*

### **Cyril**

Then, having sanctified ourselves by these spiritual hymns, we beseech the merciful God to send forth his Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before him, that he may make the bread the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ, for whatsoever the Holy Spirit has touched is surely sanctified and changed.

Then, upon the completion of the spiritual sacrifice, the bloodless worship, over that propitiatory victim we call upon God for the common peace of the churches, for the welfare of the world, for kings, for soldiers and allies, for the sick, for the afflicted; and in summary, we all pray and offer this sacrifice for all who are in need.

*(Catechetical Lectures 23:7-8 [A.D. 350]).*

**Ambrose**

We saw the prince of priests coming to us, we saw and heard him offering his blood for us. We follow, inasmuch as we are able, being priests, and we offer the sacrifice on behalf of the people. Even if we are of but little merit, still, in the sacrifice, we are honorable. Even if Christ is not now seen as the one who offers the sacrifice, nevertheless it is he himself that is offered in sacrifice here on earth when the body of Christ is offered. Indeed, to offer himself he is made visible in us, he whose word makes holy the sacrifice that is offered.

*(Commentaries on twelve Psalms of David 38:25 [A.D. 389]).*

# The Priesthood – A Catholic Response

*(A Catholic response to Protestant objections)*

The Protestant objection to human intercession is based largely on a single line of Scripture that says, “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...*” (1 Tim. 2:5). However, we also read in the Bible that we are called upon to intercede in prayer for one another (1 Cor. 3:9, 1 Tim. 2:1-3, Eph 6:18, James 5:16, 1 John 5:16). Whereas, Jesus *is* our only mediator because only *his* blood is the perfect sacrifice before the Father for our sins, our intercession for one another is commanded in the Scriptures.

Objectors present Heb. 7:22-25 as proof for the end of the necessity for an earthly priesthood: “*This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.*”

In an apparent contradiction of the text in Hebrews, Peter states: “*like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people . . .*” (1 Peter 2:5-9). However, Peter and Paul aren’t contradicting each other - but are making complimentary points. Peter is making the point that we are all in a sense, part of a royal priesthood because we all make spiritual sacrifice. The very definition of a priest is one who makes sacrifices on behalf of others. Whereas Paul is speaking of Christ’s priesthood being superior to man’s because it is only by his sacrifice that we are saved.

This same kind of semantic distinction can be found in (Matt. 23:9). Protestants use this verse to object to the fact that Catholics refer to our priests as, “*Father*”. They point out that in this verse, Jesus tells the crowd not to refer to anybody on earth as “*Father*” because we have only one Father in heaven. What these objectors don’t mention is that Jesus is using hyperbole (*exaggeration*) to make a point and does so many times in Scripture. In the verse that precedes this (Matt: 23:8), Jesus admonishes us not to refer to others as “*Teachers*”. Is Jesus telling us that there are no fathers or teachers on earth? That is not what he is saying at all. He is telling us that no man is to be considered father *above* our Father in heaven and no person is to be considered teacher *above* our Teacher in heaven.

Acts 1:15-26 *clearly* shows the prophetic fulfillment of Apostolic succession (Psalm 109) when the 11 remaining Apostles choose another to take the place of Judas. In Acts 15:24, the Apostles make it abundantly clear that only those teachers who are sent out by them (*the Church*) should be obeyed.

## **The Rock and the Priesthood**

Matt. 16:15-19 seems to be a bone of contention with many Protestants. In it, Jesus calls Peter the “*Rock*” upon which he will build his Church. They point out that the Greek word *Petros* means “*small stone*” and *Petra* means “*large mass of rock*” or “*large boulder*”. The Greek text states, “*You are Petros (Peter) and on this Petra (Jesus), I will build my church.*” They say that if Jesus was speaking about Peter, he would have used *Petra* in both instances. That would make sense – *if Peter was a woman*. Matthew would not have referred to Peter using the feminine noun, *Petra*. *Petra* was therefore transliterated and rendered as the masculine *Petros*.

However, to understand the Greek used here – we must go back to the Aramaic language which Jesus and the Apostles spoke. Jesus actually said to Peter, “*You are Kepha and on this Kepha, I will build my church.*” We know this because Peter is referred to in some of Paul’s letters as *Kephas* or *Cephas*, (which is the Greek transliteration of *Kepha* or “*massive rock*”).

When read in context, we see that Jesus is exalting Peter, *not* rebuking him. The Protestant rendering of this text goes something like this:

**A blessing** - *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.*

**An insult** - *And so I say to you, you are a **small worthless pebble**, and upon this **giant mass of rock** I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.*

**A promise and exaltation** - *I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

Jesus wouldn't have *blessed* Peter in verse **17**, only to *insult* him in verse **18**, then, *exalt* him with the blessing of Eliakim (**Isaiah 22:20-22**) in verse **19**. Given the context of these verses, the Protestant position falls to pieces. A deeper examination of these verses shows this blessing to be ongoing or successive in nature.

In, *The Priesthood Is Both Ministerial and Universal*, (*This Rock Magazine*), former Protestant minister-turned-Catholic Apologist Tim Staples makes the following observation:

*Matthew 16:18-19: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church . . . I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

Catholics are generally well-acquainted with this text and its meaning with regard to papal infallibility. Here Jesus promises Peter the power to proclaim the gospel on earth with the infallible authority of heaven to back him up. But fewer consider its implications in relation to the forgiveness of sins (see CCC 553). In both cases, we are talking about priestly functions; that is, Peter and his successors are here promised the power to be mediators of both the message of God's truth and the healing communicated through God's forgiveness.

The text itself is clear in that it uses a very rare Greek construction that profoundly brings out the sacerdotal nature of the Petrine office. It uses the future perfect periphrastic tense, which employs the future tense of the verb “*to be*” along with the perfect participle. According to Dr. James Allen Hewett:

This tense . . . occurs rarely in the [Greek New Testament], but the student will do well to be familiar with it. Consider **Matthew 16:19** (two examples) and **18:18** (two examples): “*Whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound [estai dedemenon] in heaven and whatever you loose on the earth will have been loosed [estai lelumenon] in heaven.*” The construction declares that a completed heavenly action and its continuing results will come to exist on earth upon the completion of a future earthly event. (**New Testament Greek: A Beginning and Intermediate Grammar, 152**)

To put it simply: God's power being released “*from heaven*” is contingent upon a future event of Peter and his successors acting on earth. That, in a nutshell, could be a dictionary definition of **priest**.

Two chapters later, Jesus tells the Apostles that the Church has final authority in matters of forgiveness and reconciliation (**Matt. 18:15-17**). In the very next verse, he repeats what he told Peter in **Matt. 16:19** when he says, “*Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (**Matt. 18:18**).

Finally, in **John 20:21-23**, we read the account of what took place in the upper room on the day of the Lord's Resurrection. *Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

*And when he had said this, 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.”*

The fact that Jesus breathed on them when he gave them this power is very significant because, in all of Scripture, there are only *two* places where God breathes on man. The first is when he breathed life into Adam (**Gen 2:7**). The second place is here in John’s Gospel, where he gives the Apostles the power to forgive sins or hold them bound.

In all three cases, Jesus was not speaking to the crowds in general but to his Apostles and disciples. Contrary to Protestant claims that we *all* have this power, the general hermeneutic rule is that when Jesus spoke to the crowds, he was speaking to the whole of mankind. When he addressed the Apostles, he was more specific.

**In 2 Cor. 2:10**, Paul tells speaks of the ministerial priesthood and the ministry of Reconciliation when he writes: “*Whomever you forgive anything, so do I. For indeed **what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven for you in the presence of Christ.**”*

Three chapters later he further illustrates this priestly power in **2 Cor. 5:18-20**: “*And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

**James 5:14-15** “*If anyone is sick, let him call on the **elders (presbuteros/priests)** of the Church. They shall pray for him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. **The prayer said in faith will save the sick person; the Lord will raise him up and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.**”*

In the Old Testament, there were **three** levels of Priests: Aaron, the High Priest, the Levitical Priesthood, and the rest of the people were a general priesthood of believers.

In the New Testament, there are *also* three levels of Priests: Jesus, our High Priest (**1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:22-25**), the Ministerial/Levitical Priests (**James 5:14-15**) and the general priesthood of all Christians (**1 Peter 2:5-9**).

Just as with all New Testament fulfillments, the fulfillment is *always* more glorious than the Old Testament type.

Finally, in the Epistle of Jude, we read the warning about those who would usurp Church Authority by assuming the ministerial priesthood without the Church’s consent (**Jude 1:11**). In this passage he compares them to the rebellion of Korah and their subsequent punishment (**Numbers 16:1-35; 31:16**).

### **Early Church Teachings on Confession**

It is a common practice among those who disagree with the Catholic Church’s dogmatic positions to dismiss the testimonies of the Early Church Fathers on various subjects. If they agree with the Fathers, they will have to admit that the Church is the same Body of Christ established by Jesus himself. A rudimentary study of the Early Church illustrates *clearly* their adherence to belief in doctrinal matters such as the Real Presence in the Eucharist, Confession, the Mass, and priestly Apostolic succession:

#### **Clement of Rome**

Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, *they appointed those who have already been mentioned, and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry* (*Letter to the Corinthians 44:1 [A.D. 95]*).

## **Ignatius of Antioch**

**You must all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the Apostles.** Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans 8:1* [A.D. 110]).

## **Irenaeus**

It is possible, then, for everyone in every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. ***And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles, and their successors to our own times:*** men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics rave about. For if the Apostles had known hidden mysteries which they taught to the elite secretly and apart from the rest, they would have handed them down especially to those very ones to whom they were committing the self-same Churches. ***For surely they wished all those and their successors to be perfect and without reproach, to whom they handed on their authority.*** (*Against Heresies 3:3:1* [A.D. 180-199]).

**It is necessary to obey those who are the presbyters in the Church, those who, as we have shown, have succession from the Apostles; those who have received, with the succession of the episcopate, the sure charism of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father.** But the rest, who have no part in the primitive succession and assemble wheresoever they will, must be held in suspicion (ibid 4:26:2).

## **Tertullian**

Moreover, if there be any [heresies] bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, so that they might seem to have been handed down by the Apostles because they were from the time of the Apostles, we can say to them: ***let them show the origin of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their bishops, running down in succession from the beginning, so that their first bishop shall have for author and predecessor some one of the Apostles or of the apostolic men who continued steadfast with the Apostles. For this is the way in which the apostolic Churches transmit their lists: like the Church of the Smyrnaeans, which records that Polycarp was placed there by John; like the Church of the Romans where Clement was ordained by Peter. In just this same way the other Churches display those whom they have as sprouts from the apostolic seed, having been established in the episcopate by the Apostles.*** Let the heretics invent something like it. After their blasphemies, what could be unlawful for them? But even if they should contrive it, they will accomplish nothing; for their doctrine itself, when compared with that of the Apostles, will show by its own diversity and contrariety that it has for its author neither an Apostle nor an apostolic man. The Apostles would not have differed among themselves in teaching, nor would an apostolic man have taught contrary to the Apostles, unless those who were taught by the Apostles then preached otherwise.

Therefore, they will be challenged to meet this test even by those Churches which are of much later date – for they are being established daily – and whose founder is not from among the Apostles nor from among the apostolic men; for those which agree in the same faith are reckoned as apostolic on account of the blood ties in their doctrine. Then let all heresies prove how they regard themselves as apostolic, when they are challenged by our Churches to meet either test. But in fact they are not apostolic, nor can they prove themselves to be what they are not. Neither are they received in peace and communion by the Churches which are in any way apostolic, since on account of their diverse belief they are in no way apostolic (*The Demurrer Against the Heretics 32:1* [A.D. 200]).

## **Clement of Alexandria**

After the death of the tyrant, the [Apostle John] came back again to Ephesus from the Island of Patmos; and, upon being invited, he went even to the neighboring cities of the pagans, here *to appoint bishops*, there to set in order whole Churches, *and there to ordain to the clerical estate such as were designated by the Spirit*  
(*Who is the Rich Man that is Saved? 42:2 [inter 190-210 A.D.]*).

### **Firmilion of Caesarea**

But what is his error, and *how great his blindness, who says that the remission of sins can be given in the synagogues of the heretics, and who does not remain on the foundation of the one Church which was founded upon the rock by Christ* can be learned from this, which Christ said to Peter alone: “Whatever things you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed in heaven;” and by this, again in the gospel, when Christ breathed upon the Apostles alone, saying to them; “Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive any man his sins, they shall be forgiven; and if you retain any mans sins, they shall be retained.” Therefore, *the power of forgiving sins was given to the Apostles and to the Churches which these men, sent by Christ, established; and to the bishops who succeeded them by being ordained in their place* (*Letter to Cyprian 75:16 [A.D. 255-256]*).

# Tradition

## *(A Catholic response to Protestant objections)*

The Protestant doctrine of Sola Scriptura – the idea that the Bible alone is our sole authority – is built upon extremely shaky and virtually non-existent ground. Nowhere in all of Scripture are we told that the Scriptures are our final authority on earth.

The Bible is abundantly clear, however, that the Church is the final Authority on earth in all matters of faith and morals (**Matt. 16:15-19, 15-18, Luke 10:16, John 16:12-15, 20:21-23, 1 Cor. 11:2, 2 Thess 2:15, 2 Thess. 3:6, 2 Tim. 2:2**) and is the *pillar and foundation of truth* (**1 Tim. 3:15**). Despite the solid evidence supporting Tradition, many non-Catholics still argue against the very Scriptures that they believe to be *more* binding than Tradition.

Whereas, most Protestants believe in **Sola Scriptura** (*the Scriptures Alone*), Catholics adhere to the doctrine of **Sola Dei Verbum** (*the Word of God Alone*). We know that the Scriptures are the **written** word of God but they do not explicitly encompass all of God's truth. We see this in the very first line of John's Gospel where it explicitly states that **Jesus** is the Word of God – not the Bible. Conversely, the very last line in that same Gospel tells us that Jesus did many things that were **not** written down and that ***"if all were written down, the world itself would not hold the books recording them."***

Even the Jews placed their traditions on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures. One glaring example of this is in **2 Timothy 3:8**. In this verse Paul says, ***"Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so they also oppose the truth--people of depraved mind, unqualified in the faith."*** You might think that Paul is quoting the Old Testament but is, in fact, quoting Rabbinical Tradition. The names of the magicians who opposed Moses (**Ex. 7:11-12**) are **never** mentioned in the Old Testament, yet St. Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit reveals these names to us as part of the inspired Word of God.

Here are several examples of NT authors making references to oral traditions that cannot be found in Scripture. **NONE** of the following references made are from the Old Testament, but from **Oral Tradition** and are all held as the inspired Word of God:

**Matthew 2:23** – Here, we read that Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth after their stay in Egypt, ***"that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'"***  
***(This prophecy is found nowhere in the Old Testament).***

**Matthew 23:2** - As Jesus begins to rebuke the Pharisees and scribes, he says: ***"The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not office in Israel. (There is no mention of a "Seat of Moses" in the Old Testament).***

**1 Corinthians 10:4** - Paul refers to the rock in the desert from which the Israelites drank: ***"All drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ."***  
***(There is no mention of in the Old Testament of the rock following the Israelites).***

**Jude 9** - Jude speaks of a dispute between the Archangel Michael and Satan: ***"When the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'"***  
***(You will find no mention of this altercation in the Old Testament).***

**Jude 14-15** - St. Jude is telling us about the disobedient and refers to Enoch: ***"It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness"***

*which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*

*(This statement is found nowhere in the Old Testament).*

To say that *all* of God's truth is contained in the pages of the Bible is to plummet into the proverbial rabbit hole that is the false and self-refuting Protestant doctrine of Sola Scriptura.

Those who would profess this falsehood usually point to the “*human precepts*” and “*traditions of men*” that Jesus warned against (**Matt. 15:9, Mark 7:5-9**). When read these verses in context, we see that Jesus was decrying the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes who placed their own traditions *above* the word of God and the spirit of the Law.

St. Paul tells us that we are to *hold fast* to the traditions taught by the Apostles – either by an “*oral statement or written letter*” (**2 Thess. 2:15, 2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Cor. 11:2**). He goes on to say in **1 Tim. 3:15**, that the Church is the “*pillar and foundation of truth.*” He doesn't make this claim about the *Bible* it because it hadn't been compiled and much of it had not yet been written. In these verses, he is stating plainly that Sacred Tradition and Scripture go hand in hand and are of equal importance.

In one of the many passages where Jesus relayed his authority to the Apostles, he promised them that there were many things they needed to know but could not hear at that time. He also promised them that the Holy Spirit would guide his Church to all truth about the things that were coming (**John 16:13-15**).

We see that the importance of Sacred or Apostolic Tradition – *even when compared to the Scriptures* - is confirmed by the Scriptures themselves. There are other minor traditions, however, that may be disciplinary and others that are cultural and not necessarily binding to the faith. Some of these might include wearing head-coverings during mass, feast days, advent wreaths, or other customs.

One common Protestant argument against the authority of the Sacred Tradition spoken of in verses like **2 Thess. 3:6** and **1 Cor. 11:2** involves the traditions themselves. They issue the challenge to Catholics to produce one single tradition that is not *explicitly* taught in the Bible. The Catholic can point straight to the canon of the Bible itself. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we see a list of books that comprise the Bible. This canon was declared by the Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit (**Acts 15:28**) centuries *after* the Apostolic Age. Paul does *not* say in these passages that one should stop believing in traditions handed down by the Church after they (the Apostles) were dead. Despite Protestant objections to the sacred traditions of the Church, verses like **2 Thess. 3:6** have no expiration date.

### **Early Church Teachings on Tradition**

The Early Church was keenly aware of St. Paul's admonitions about Sacred Traditions and understood well their importance. They didn't always appeal *solely* to the Scriptures in matters of faith and morals - nor did their predecessors, the Apostles (**Acts 15:28**).

#### **Papias**

Whenever anyone came my way, who had been a follower of my seniors, I would ask for the accounts of our seniors: What did Andrew or Peter say? Or Phillip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any of the Lord's disciples? I also asked: What did Aristion and John the Presbyter, disciples of the Lord say. For, as I see it, it is not so much from books as from the living and permanent voice that I must draw profit.

*(The Sayings of the Lord [between A.D. 115 and 140] as recorded by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3:39 [A.D. 325]).*

#### **Irenaeus**

For even creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him who made it, and the world manifests Him who ordered it. The Universal [Catholic] Church, moreover, through the whole world, has received this tradition from the Apostles. (*Against Heresies 2:9 [A.D. 189]*).

True knowledge is the doctrine of the Apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, ***and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved, without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither addition nor curtailment [in truths which she believes];*** and [it consists in] reading [the Word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy...  
(**ibid. 4:33 [A.D. 189]**).

### **Tertullian**

For wherever both the true Christian rule and faith shall be shown to be, ***there will be the true Scriptures, and the true expositions, of all the true Christian traditions.***  
(***The Prescription of Heretics 19 [A.D. 200]***).

### **Origen**

Seeing there are many who think they hold the opinions of Christ, and yet some of these think differently from their predecessors, yet as the teaching of the Church, transmitted in orderly succession from the Apostles, and remaining in the churches to the present day, is still preserved, that alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no respect from ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition.  
(***On First Principles Bk. 1 Preface 2 [circa A.D. 225]***).

### **Eusebius**

While [Ignatius of Antioch] was making the journey through Asia under the strictest military guard, he strengthened the diocese in each city where he stayed by spoken sermons and exhortations, and he especially exhorted them above all to be on their guard against the heresies which then for the first time were prevalent and he urged them to hold fast to the tradition of the Apostles to which he thought it necessary, for securities sake, to give form by written testimony.  
(***Ecclesiastical History, 3:36 [A.D. 325]***).

### **Athanasius**

Without prefixing Consulate, month, and day, [the Fathers] wrote concerning Easter, "It seemed good as follows," for it did then seem good that there should be a general compliance; but about the faith they wrote not, "It seemed good" but, "Thus believes the Catholic Church"; and thereupon they confessed how they believed, in order to show that their own sentiments were not novel, but Apostolic; and what they wrote down was no discovery of theirs, but is the same as was taught by the Apostles.  
(***Letter on the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia [A.D. 359]***).

### **Basil**

***Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us "in mystery" by the tradition of the Apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force.*** And these no one will contradict; - no one, at all events, who is even moderately versed in the institutions of the Church. ***For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in these matters...***  
(***On the Holy Spirit 27 [A.D. 375]***).

### **Jerome**

Don't you know that the laying on of hands after baptism and then the invocation of the Holy Spirit is a custom of the Churches? Do you demand Scripture proof? You may find it in the Acts of the Apostles. And even if it did not rest on the authority of Scripture the consensus of the whole world in this respect

would have the force of a command. **For many other observances of the Churches, which are do to tradition, have acquired the authority of the written law.**  
(*The Dialogue Against the Luciferians* 8 [A.D. 382]).

#### **John Chrysostom**

"So then brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). ***Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther.***  
(*Homilies on Second Thessalonians* [circa A.D. 400]).

#### **Vincent of Lerins**

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or any one else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, ***we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways: first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church.***  
(*Commonitory* 2 [A.D. 434])

#### **Theodoret**

I have ever kept the faith of the Apostles undefiled... ***So have I learnt not only from the Apostles and the Prophets but also from the interpreters of their writings, Ignatius, Eustathius, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, John, and the rest of the lights of the world;*** and before these from the holy Fathers in council at Nicaea, whose confession of the faith I preserve in its integrity, like an ancestral inheritance [styling corrupt and enemies of the truth all who dare to transgress its decrees]  
(*Letters no. 89* [circa A.D. 443]).

# WHAT'S UP WITH ... Protestantism

(a rebuttal of "WHAT'S UP WITH ... Roman Catholicism" from [juststopandthink.com](http://juststopandthink.com))

When we compare the teachings of the Church to the Scriptures and the writings of the Early Church Fathers, it *really* doesn't take long to realize that the Catholic Church is the one and only authority that Jesus left us. It is also abundantly clear that the truths of Christ were blurred and in some cases completely obliterated by the Protestant Reformation some 1500 years later.

Though many of the issues that divide Catholics and Protestants today are very minor, some of them are as different as night and day - as are the ramifications. Our intent is to compare those differences with Scripture, Tradition and the writings and teachings of the Early Church. The articles in this series will compare the Catholic position against the varying Protestant positions - and there are many, many differing opinions among the Protestant denominations.

The Protestant charge against the Catholic Church's "*traditions of men*" is a gross misunderstanding of the promises of Christ combined with a rather acrobatic twisting of the Scriptures (**2 Pet. 3:16**). After considering what is taught in Scripture, it will become clear to the reader this false charge is really an exercise in self-examination for the non-Catholic.

## Answering the Critics

The following articles are rebuttals to Protestant positions on the Catholic Church as outlined on the anti-Catholic section of "[juststopandthink.com](http://juststopandthink.com)", an Evangelical website that seeks to "reach out" to Catholics by misrepresenting many of our beliefs:

**Baptism, A Catholic Response** – *A Catholic response to Protestant objections*

**Confession, A Catholic Response** – *A Catholic response to Protestant objections*

**The Mass, A Catholic Response** – *A Catholic response to Protestant objections*

**The Eucharist, A Catholic Response** – *A Catholic response to Protestant objections*

**The Priesthood, A Catholic Response** – *A Catholic response to Protestant objections*

**Tradition, A Catholic Response** – *A Catholic response to Protestant objections*

**Catholic "Inventions" Debunked** – *A refutation of a litany of false or otherwise ludicrous claims about the Catholic Church*

At the end of our earthly life when we stand before God, we will not have anybody to defend us but ourselves. We will have to give an account for what we did and didn't do. Did we trust in our Lord Jesus' promises to his Church or did we count on our own prideful opinions, shunning the authority he left us? For example, Jesus' fervent prayer for the unity of his Church in **John 17** was completely disregarded by the Reformers. This tragedy is clearly evident today by the tens of thousands of constantly splintering sects that continue to grow in number.

The Bible is the written word of God and, as such, is without error. However, it did not fall from the sky. It was written (*the books of the New Testament*), compiled and declared canonical by the Catholic Church at the Councils of Rome (382), Carthage (393), Hippo (397), and reiterated at Trent (1546). In **John 14:6** Jesus said, "*I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" In **Acts 9:4-5**, he equates the Church with his very self. It is of paramount importance to point out that the Church (in **1 Tim. 3:15**) is also called "*the pillar and foundation of truth*" - since it is the Body of Christ. Likewise, it is essential that we acknowledge the fact that the Scriptures refer to the **Church** as the truth - not the Scriptures themselves.

Since, by the false doctrine of Sola Scriptura, the various Protestant denominations declare the Bible alone to be the Word of God and our sole authority, we will compare that with what the Bible *really* has to say about these things.

The confusion that was caused by the Reformation continues to reverberate to this day. The tens of thousands of Protestant “denominations” continue to splinter day after day, year after year. The abandonment of the doctrines and precepts of God have given way to the doctrines and precepts of mere men (**Matthew 15:8-9, Mark 7:6-7**):

Some Protestant denominations believe in baptismal regeneration, *while others do not*.

Some believe in soul-sleep, *while others do not*.

Some believe in a limited atonement for sins, *while others do not*.

Some believe in the Holy Trinity, *while others do not*.

Some believe in doctrine of Eternal Security (once saved, always saved), *while others do not*.

Some believe in a pre-tribulation “Rapture”, *while others do not*.

Some believe that all people were predestined for either heaven or hell, *while others do not*.

Some believe in a woman’s right to choose abortion, *while others do not*.

Some believe that practicing homosexuality is a sin, *while others do not*.

Most believe in contraception, *while others do not* – and the list goes on and on.

Finally – while this is in no way an attack on any Protestant denomination – it is a presentation of the truths of God as preserved, protected and defended by His Church with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (**John 16:12-15, 1 Tim. 3:15**). The simple fact, however, is that every single Protestant denomination was started by a flawed, sinful human being. By contrast, the Catholic Church was established by none other than Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – God himself.

### **Early Church Teachings on the Authority of the Church**

With each response, we will show the solid Biblical evidence for our beliefs as well as the overwhelming support from the written testimonies of the Early Church. The authority of the Church was recognized by the Early Church Fathers, despite the many Protestant objections that exist today:

#### **Ignatius of Antioch**

Follow your bishop, every one of you, as obediently as Jesus Christ followed the Father. Obey your clergy too as you would the apostles; give your deacons the same reverence that you would to a command of God. Make sure that no step affecting the Church is ever taken by anyone without the bishop’s sanction. The sole Eucharist you should consider valid is one that is celebrated by the bishop himself, or by some person authorized by him. **Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as, wherever Jesus Christ is present, there is the Catholic Church.**

*(Letter to the Smyrneans 8:2 [A.D. 110]).*

In like manner let everyone respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ, and just as *they respect the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and college of the apostles. Without these, it cannot be called a Church.* I am confident that you accept this, for I have received the exemplar of your love and have it with me in the person of your bishop. His very demeanor is a great lesson and his meekness is his strength. I believe that even the godless do respect him.

*(Letter to the Trallians 3:1-2 [A. D. 110]).*

#### **The Martyrdom of Polycarp**

When finally he concluded his prayer, after remembering all who had at any time come his way – small folk and great folk, distinguished and undistinguished, and the whole Catholic Church throughout the world – the time for departure came. So they placed him on an ass, and brought him into the city on a

great Sabbath.

*(The Martyrdom of Polycarp 8 [A.D. 110]).*

### **Irenaeus**

*The Catholic Church* possesses one and the same faith throughout the whole world, as we have already said.

*(Against Heresies 1:10 [A.D. 189]).*

Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. ***For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers.*** On this account we are bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the things pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For how stands the case? Suppose there should arise a dispute relative to some important question among us. Should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary [in that case] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the churches? (ibid. 3:4).

### **Tertullian**

Where was Marcion then, that shipmaster of Pontus, the zealous student of Stoicism? Where was Valentinus then, the disciple of Platonism? For it is evident that those men lived not so long ago – in the reign of Antoninus for the most part – ***and that they at first were believers in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, in the church of Rome under the episcopate of the blessed Eleutherus,*** until on account of their ever restless curiosity, with which they even infected the brethren, they were more than once expelled.

*(On the Prescription Against Heretics 22,30 [A.D.200])*

### **Clement of Alexandria**

A multitude of other pieces of advice to particular persons is written in the holy books: some for presbyters, some for bishops and deacons; and others for widows, of whom we shall have opportunity to speak elsewhere.

*(The Instructor of Children 3:12:97:2 [pre-A.D. 202]).*

Even here in the Church the gradations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the apostles and who have lived in complete righteousness according to the gospel.

*(Stromateis 6:13:107:2 [post-A.D. 202]).*

### **Hippolytus**

When a deacon is to be ordained, he is chosen after the fashion of those things said above, the bishop alone in like manner imposing his hands upon him as we have prescribed. In the ordaining of a deacon, this is the reason why the bishop alone is to impose his hands upon him: He is not ordained to the priesthood, but to serve the bishop and to fulfill the bishop's command. He has no part in the council of the clergy, but is to attend to his own duties and is to acquaint the bishop with such matters as are needful. . . On a presbyter [priest], however, let the presbyters impose their hands because of the common and like Spirit of the clergy. Even so, the presbyter has only the power to receive [the Spirit], and not the power to give [the Spirit]. That is why a presbyter does not ordain the clergy; for at the ordaining of a presbyter, he but seals while the bishop ordains.

*(Apostolic Tradition 9 [ca. A.D. 215]).*

## **Origen**

Not fornication only, but even marriages make us unfit for ecclesiastical honors; for neither a bishop, nor a presbyter, nor a deacon, nor a widow is able to be twice married.

*(Homilies on Luke, 17 [ca. A.D. 235]).*

## **Cyprian**

The spouse of Christ cannot be defiled; she is uncorrupted and chaste. She knows one home . . . *Does anyone believe that this unity which comes from divine strength, which is closely connected with the divine sacraments, can be broken asunder in the Church and be separated by the divisions of colliding wills? He who does not hold this unity, does not hold the law of God, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, does not hold life and salvation.*

*(On the Unity of the Catholic Church 6 [A.D. 251]).*

*Peter speaks there, on whom the Church was to be built, teaching and showing in the name of the Church, that although a rebellious and arrogant multitude of those who will not hear or obey may depart, yet the Church does not depart from Christ; and they are the Church who are a people united to the priest, and the flock which adheres to its pastor. **Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church,** and that those flatter themselves in vain who creep in, not having peace with God's priests, and think that they communicate secretly with some; **while the Church which is Catholic and one, is not cut nor divided, but is indeed connected and bound together by the cement of priests who cohere with one another.***

*(Letters 66 [A.D. 253]).*