

Jesus, while on earth, also established His Church. Our friendship with God is personal, but the "Jesus and me" relationship draws us into a community relationship (Gal. 6:10; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:20-21). God calls us all to friendship as one family, the Church. The members of the Church on earth (the Church Militant) help each other to grow more in the love and friendship of God through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), yet we are called upon to pray and intercede for each other (1 Tim. 2:1-2). The saints in Heaven are also part of the Church family (Eph. 3:15). They are alive in Heaven with Jesus (Matt. 22:29-32; Luke 9:30) and are called the Church Triumphant. The saints in Heaven are a "cloud of witnesses." [Heb. 12:1] *"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."* [Luke 15:7]

The Church can also be seen as the new kingdom. Jesus Christ is King (Luke 1:33), while Mary is His Queen Mother (1 King 2:19; Jer. 29:2). Jesus also chose His representatives and a prime minister to help Him govern His Church (2 Sam. 8:15-18; Isa. 22:20-22; 2 King 18:37). He chose Simon and renamed him as Rock - Peter or Cephas (John 1:42). *"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. 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."* [Matt. 16:18-19; cf. Isa. 22:20-22] The Pope is the successor to St. Peter and the visible leader of the Church on earth.

We believe that we can continue to share in Christ's Sacrifice and triumph over sin and death. *"The Lord Jesus on the night when he was*

betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ...*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."* [1 Cor. 11:23-26] The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass or celebration of the Eucharist is a commemoration of Our Lord's Last Supper and at the same time a re-presentation of Our Lord's Sacrifice on the Cross (Rev. 5:6; CCC 1137). It is the pure Sacrifice as prophesied in **Malachi** 1:11 (Didache 14).

This short summary only presents a few major points of what Catholics believe. More details on the following topics can be found in the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (CCC), under the sections on: God (198-231), Jesus (430-455), Trinity (232-267), Mary (487-511), Original Sin (396-421), Hell (1033-1041), Purgatory (1030-1032), Heaven (1023-1029), Salvation (161,169,1987 -1995), Faith (142-184), Grace (1996 -2029), Tradition (75-100), Bible (101-141), Church (169, 171, 811-879), Pope (880-896), Sacraments (1113-1134) and the Mass (1136-1139; 1341-1382).

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The Catholic Faith in Brief

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Apostles' Creed: We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to hell. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

We Catholic Christians believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of all things, seen and unseen. God revealed His name as Yahweh which means *"I AM WHO AM"* [Ex. 3:14]. This name reveals God as the uncreated source of all being. He also revealed Himself as Love (1 John 4:16) and as Holy (Ps. 99:9; Luke 1:49). He created us so that we might share in His life and love. But He is also Holy and awesome. *"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* [Ps. 111:10] Our ultimate purpose in life is to share forever in His life and love by knowing, loving and serving Him now (Eccles. 12:13-14).

God created us in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:27; 6:3; John 4:24). This sets us apart from plants and animals. He desires us to love Him, but we can freely choose to love Him or to rebel against Him. God does not force us to love Him in return. Our love is expressed by obeying His commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2-3). Sin is our rejection of God's friendship by disobeying Him. Adam and Eve, our first parents, chose to reject God and His friendship.

This first rebellion is called Original Sin. Because of Adam's sin, we lost the gift of original holiness and justice (1 Cor. 15:21-22). Men and women became alienated from God and from each other. We now need a Redeemer to reestablish friendship with God.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God (Heb. 1; John 1:14). He is the Second Divine Person of the Holy Trinity. The Father and Son are two Divine Persons who love each other (John 10:30). This love bond is the Third Divine Person, the Holy Spirit. There is only one God, yet three Divine Persons. This is professed in the simple verse, *"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* [Matt. 28:19]

"But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." [Gal. 4:4-5]. The first century A.D. marks the time in the history of mankind, when God the Son became man. Christ is true God (John 5:18; 9:38; 20:28; Matt. 4:10; 28:17; Col. 2:9) and true man (1 Tim. 2:5). He was born of the virgin, Mary (Matt. 1:18-23). Since Jesus is a Divine Person and Mary is the mother of Jesus, Mary can be called the Mother of God, even though she is only human and not divine (Luke 1:42-43). Mary directs us to Jesus. Now Jesus came into the world to fully reveal the Father and His love for all mankind. Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. For love of us, He suffered and died on the Cross at the hands of sinful men to save us from Hell (Rom. 5; CCC 633). His sacrifice redeems us from our sins (Rom. 6:6), but it is also an example for us of loving sacrifice (1 Pet. 2:19-24). On the third day, He rose physically from the dead and reestablished the friendship between God and man. Jesus is the Savior of all mankind. Christ gives us back more than Adam lost, so we can say: "O happy

fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!" [Exultet on Holy Saturday]

We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ; however, faith is more than believing in God. *"Even the demons believe - and shudder."* [James 2:19] Moved by grace, faith is also our turning from selfishness to a reliance on God (CCC 2018). This response includes obedience to God (Rom. 1:5; Heb. 5:9; Matt. 7:21). God wills us to be holy (1 Thess. 4:3-8). We cannot merit Heaven (CCC 1024) by our good works (Eph. 2:8-10), yet Jesus will still judge us all according to our deeds (2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:33ff). Our unrepented mortal (deadly) sins can earn us Hell. We can willfully reject God's gift of salvation by mortal sin. In similar fashion, voting or jury duty do not merit civil liberties, but committing a felony deserves prison. If we freely choose the pleasures of sin instead of God's friendship, then we reject faith and choose Hell, which is eternal separation from God (CCC 1033). Fortunately, by the grace and mercy of God, we can repent (while still alive) from our sins and be forgiven by God (CCC 2018). We can be saved from Hell and have eternal life with Jesus. The Blood of Christ washes away the guilt of our sins (1 John 1:7). Purgatory is the fire of God's love which purges us of the attachment to our sins (Heb. 12:29; 1 Cor. 3:12-15). We are saved by the grace of God which Jesus merited for us on the Cross. Salvation comes from God alone.

This saving grace is received through the Sacraments, beginning with Baptism (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). By the Baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, we receive Sanctifying Grace which makes us right with God (John 3:5; Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). We are born again as children of God (Titus 3:3-5). Since we can still sin seriously after Baptism and lose the gift of eternal life, Jesus gave us the Sacrament of

Penance and Reconciliation (John 20:21-23). In this Sacrament, we can confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness and graces. God is merciful and forgiving. Jesus also gives us His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Blessed Sacrament, the Eucharist (John 6; 1 Cor. 11). His Food helps us grow stronger in our friendship with God. The Catholic Church recognizes seven Sacraments - Baptism (Matt. 28:18-19), Reconciliation (John 20:21-23), the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16), Confirmation (Acts 8:14-17), Holy Matrimony (Eph. 5:22-32), Holy Orders (Acts 6:5-6) and Anointing of the Sick (Mark 6:13; James 5:14-15). These Sacraments are outward signs instituted by Christ that give us God's saving graces.

God revealed Himself and His love for us all through Abraham, Moses, the Prophets and finally through His Son - Jesus, the Incarnate Word (John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-3). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, some of God's revelations were eventually written down as scriptures. These scriptures are books that were later put together into the Bible. The Catholic Church teaches that the Bible is the written Word of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the scriptures were written down by men but authored by God. But the teachings of the Apostles inspired by the Holy Spirit were also transmitted by word of mouth (2 Tim. 2:2). *"Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter."* [2 Thess. 2:15] Even though the Bible is the Word of God, it still needs to be interpreted (2 Pet. 1:20-21). This teaching, which helps us understand and interpret the Bible, is called Sacred Tradition. The **Apostle's Creed** is an example of Sacred Tradition that preceded the Bible. Yet both belong together, since both are inspired of the same Holy Spirit.