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global popularity

Rev. John Trigilio Jr., PhD, ThD

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Authors of Catholic Mass For Dummies



Catholicism

3rd Edition

**by Rev. John Trigilio Jr., PhD, ThD and
Rev. Kenneth Brighenti, PhD**

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Introduction

Three great religions trace their roots to the prophet Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And one of those religions, Christianity, is expressed in three different traditions: Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy. You may already know that. You may also already know that, currently, more than 1 billion Catholics occupy the earth. That's approximately one-fifth of the world's population.

Whether you're Catholic or not, you may be totally clueless about or just unaware of some aspects of Catholic tradition, history, doctrine, worship, devotion, or culture. No sweat. Regardless of whether you're engaged, married, or related to a Catholic; your neighbor or co-worker is a Catholic; or you're just curious about what Catholics really do believe, this book is for you.

Catholicism For Dummies, 3rd Edition, realizes that you're smart and intelligent, but maybe you didn't attend Blessed Sacrament Grade School, St. Thomas Aquinas High School, or Catholic University of America. This book's goal is to give you a taste of Catholicism. It's not a Catechism or religion textbook but a casual, down-to-earth introduction for non-Catholics and a reintroduction for Catholics. It gives common-sense explanations about what Catholics believe and do in plain English, with just enough why and how thrown in to make solid sense.

Although *Catholicism For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is no substitute for the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, our hope is that it'll wet your whistle. We don't cover everything about Catholicism, but we do discuss the basic stuff so that the next time you're invited to a Catholic wedding, baptism, funeral, confirmation, or First Communion, you won't be totally confused. And you may have an edge on other people in your life who are less informed about Catholicism than you.

About This Book

This book covers plenty of material on Catholicism — from doctrine to morality and from worship and liturgy to devotions — but you don't need a degree in theology to comprehend it. Everything is presented in an informal, easy-to-understand way.

This book is also a reference, unlike the schoolbooks you had as a kid. You don't have to read the chapters in order, one after the other, from front cover to back cover. You can just pick the topic that interests you or find the page that addresses the specific question you have. Or you can indiscriminately open the book and pick a place to begin reading.

The Catholic Church is known to be among the top ten when it comes to keeping good records. In fact, the monks were the first to print the Bible, by hand, long before Gutenberg was able to mass-produce it on his printing press in 1450. And if you were baptized or married in a Catholic church, you can always find a record of your baptism in the parish where the baptism or marriage took place — even if it was more than, say, 60 years ago. So naturally, after 2,000 years of baptisms, weddings, funerals, tribunals, annulments, Church councils, papal documents of one kind or another, *hagiographies* (biographies of the saints), investigations for canonization, and so on, the Church has its share of records and printed text, for sure. What's more, Latin is still the official language of the Church, so official documents are first written in Latin before being translated into English or some other language.

Throughout this book, if you see the word *orthodox* with a small letter *o*, it means correct or right believer. However, if you see the capital letter *O*, then *Orthodox* refers to the Eastern Orthodox Churches, such as the Greek, Russian, and Serbian Orthodox Churches. Also, if you see the word *church* with a small letter *c*, it refers to a church building or parish, but *Church* with a capital *C* refers to the universal Catholic Church.

Bible references in this book use the traditional chapter and verse designation of a chapter number followed by a colon and the verse number(s). For example, Deuteronomy 6:4–6 refers to the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy from verse 4 all the way to and including verse 6. Unless we tell you otherwise, our Scripture references are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

Rather than reinvent the wheel, we decided to take advantage of the wisdom of the Church, which uses four pillars of faith to divide the material contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Catechism is the formal collection of dogmas and doctrines of the Magisterium: the official teaching authority of Catholicism as exercised through the pope and the bishops in union with him around the world. (The word *Magisterium* comes from the Latin *magister*, meaning teacher.) The pillars upon which the Catholic religion stands are these:

- » The creed: What is believed
- » The sacraments: Liturgically celebrating what is believed

- » The Commandments: Living the faith
- » The Lord's Prayer: Making the faith personal

The first four parts of this book correspond with these four pillars.

Foolish Assumptions

While writing this book, we made some assumptions about you:

- » You have Catholic friends, neighbors, or relatives, and you're curious about Catholicism and want to know a little more about it.
- » You've heard or read something about Catholics or Catholicism, and you have questions about Catholic beliefs or practices.
- » You may or may not be Catholic. Perhaps you were baptized Catholic but not raised Catholic. Maybe you're committed to a different faith, still searching, or have no faith to speak of. Regardless, you do want to know something about Catholics.

Icons Used in This Book

This book uses icons to point out various types of information:



REMEMBER

Ummm, well, we can't remember what this icon's supposed to point out. Just kidding. This icon draws your attention to information that's worth remembering because it's basic to Catholicism.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon alerts you to technical or historical background stuff that's not essential to know. Feel free to divert thine eyes whenever you see this icon.



TIP

This icon points out useful tidbits to help you make more sense out of something Catholic.



WARNING

This icon points out cautionary areas of Catholicism, such as the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday or Saturday evening. (Not doing so without a legitimate excuse, such as illness or severe weather, is a grave sin.)

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for "Catholicism For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the search box.

Where to Go from Here

Catholicism For Dummies, 3rd Edition, is sort of like Sunday dinner at an Italian grandmother's home. Nonna brings everything to the table: bread, antipasto, cheese, olives, prosciutto and melon, tomatoes and mozzarella; then comes the pasta or macaroni in marinara or meat sauce with sausage and peppers, meatballs, and veal; then comes the chicken, the pork, or the beef; followed by salad; and topped off with fruit and cheese, spumoni, gelato, ricotta pie, zabaglione, and an espresso with a splash of sambucca.

Likewise, in this book, we've brought out a little bit of everything on Catholicism: doctrine, morality, history, theology, canon law, spirituality, and liturgy. You can go to any section to discover Catholicism. You can pick and choose what interests you the most, get answers to specific questions on your mind, or just randomly open this book anywhere and begin reading. On the other hand, you may want to start at the beginning and work your way to the end, going through each chapter one by one. We don't guarantee that you'll be full when you're finished, but we hope that you'll get a good taste of what Catholicism is really about.

1

What Do Catholics Believe?

IN THIS PART . . .

Find out what Catholics learn in religion class and what the Church teaches all its members. You'll look at the doctrines and beliefs every Catholic is expected to know and accept. The first pillar of faith of the Catechism is the creed and it is explained in this part.

Discover the revealed Word of God, including the Bible.

Explore Catholic beliefs about God as the Creator of everything.

Examine fundamental Christian teachings, such as the divinity of Christ and Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Understand the Church, its mission, and the means by which it fulfills that mission.

Get the rundown of the key figures in the Catholic hierarchy, the many, many people who make up the Church as an organization.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting a sense of the Catholic perspective
- » Introducing Church teachings
- » Participating in Catholic worship
- » Behaving and praying like a Catholic

Chapter **1**

What It Means to Be Catholic

Being Catholic means more than attending parochial school or going to religion class once a week, owning some rosary beads, and going to Mass every Saturday night or Sunday morning. It means more than getting ashes smeared on your forehead once a year, eating fish on Fridays, and giving up chocolate for Lent. Being Catholic means living a totally Christian life and having a Catholic perspective.

What is the Catholic perspective? In this chapter, you get a peek at what Catholicism is all about — the common buzzwords and beliefs — a big picture of the whole shebang. (The rest of this book gets into the nitty-gritty details.)

What Exactly Is Catholicism Anyway?

The cut-to-the-chase answer is that *Catholicism* is a Christian religion (just as are Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy). *Catholics* are members of the Roman Catholic Church (which means they follow the authority of the bishop of Rome, otherwise known as the pope), and they share various beliefs and ways of worship, as well as a distinct outlook on life. Catholics can be either Latin (Western) or Eastern (Oriental) Catholic; both are equally in union with the bishop of Rome (the pope), but they retain their respective customs and traditions.

Catholics believe that all people are basically good, but sin is a spiritual disease that wounded humankind initially and can kill humankind spiritually if left unchecked. Divine grace is the only remedy for sin, and the best source of divine grace is from the *sacraments*, which are various rites that Catholics believe have been created by Jesus and entrusted by Him to His Church.

From the Catholic perspective, here are some of the bottom-line beliefs:

- » More than an intellectual assent to an idea, Catholicism involves a daily commitment to embrace the will of God — whatever it is and wherever it leads.
- » Catholicism means cooperation with God on the part of the believer. God offers His divine grace (His gift of unconditional love), and the Catholic must accept it and then cooperate with it.
- » Free will is sacred. God never forces you to do anything against your free will. Yet doing evil not only hurts you but also hurts others because a Catholic is never alone. Catholics are always part of a spiritual family called the *Church*.
- » More than a place to go on the weekend to worship, the Church is a mother who feeds spiritually, shares doctrine, heals and comforts, and disciplines when needed. Catholicism considers the Church as important to salvation as the sacraments because both were instituted by Christ.

The Catholic perspective sees everything as being intrinsically created good but with the potential of turning to darkness. It honors the individual intellect and well-formed conscience and encourages members to use their minds to think things through. In other words, instead of just giving a list of do's and don'ts, the Catholic Church educates its members to use their ability to reason and to apply laws of ethics and a natural moral law in many situations.

Catholicism doesn't see science or reason as enemies of faith but as cooperators in seeking the truth. Although Catholicism has an elaborate hierarchy to provide leadership in the Church (see Chapter 6), Catholicism also teaches individual responsibility and accountability. Education and the secular and sacred sciences are high priorities. Using logical and coherent arguments to explain and defend the Catholic faith is important.

Catholicism isn't a one-day-a-week enterprise. It doesn't segregate religious and moral dimensions of life from political, economic, personal, and familial dimensions. Catholicism tries to integrate faith into everything.



REMEMBER

The general Catholic perspective is that because God created everything, *nothing* is outside God's jurisdiction, including your every thought, word, and deed — morning, noon, and night, 24/7.

Knowing What the Catholic Church Teaches

The Catholic religion is built (by Christ) on four pillars of faith: the creed (teachings), the sacraments (liturgical worship), the Ten Commandments (moral code), and the Lord's Prayer or Our Father (prayer and spirituality).

Church doctrine and dogma can be very sophisticated, which may intimidate some people. But the fundamentals are rooted in the Church's creed: the first pillar of faith. Either the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed (which we introduce in Chapter 2) is said every Sunday and holy day to reaffirm what the Church actually teaches and expects her members to believe and profess. Catholics read the Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the definitive book explaining the official teachings of the Catholic Church on faith and morals.

In this section, we briefly overview the fundamental tenets of the Church, including what the Church is and who leads it.

Grasping the basic beliefs

Catholics are first and foremost *Christians*. Like Jews and Muslims, Catholics are *monotheistic*, which means that they believe in one God. But Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, which is unique to Christianity. Catholics also believe the following:

- » **The Bible is the inspired, error-free, and revealed word of God.** See Chapter 2 for an introduction to the Bible.
- » **Baptism, the rite of becoming a Christian, is necessary for salvation.** This is true whether the Baptism occurs by water, blood, or desire (see Chapter 8).
- » **God's Ten Commandments provide a moral compass — an ethical standard to live by.** We discuss the Ten Commandments in detail in Chapter 12.
- » **There is one God in three persons: the Holy Trinity.** In other words, Catholics embrace the belief that God, the one Supreme Being, is made up of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (see Chapter 2).



TIP

Catholics recognize the unity of body and soul for each human being. So the whole religion centers on the truth that humankind stands between the two worlds of matter and spirit. The physical world is considered part of God's creation and is, therefore, inherently good until an individual misuses it.

The *seven sacraments* — Baptism, Penance, Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and the Anointing of the Sick — are outward signs that Christ instituted to give grace. These Catholic rites marking the seven major stages of spiritual development are based on this same premise of the union of body and soul, matter and spirit, physical and spiritual. You find out more about the sacraments in this chapter's section "Worshipping as a Catholic: The Holy Mass," as well as in Chapters 8 and 9.



REMEMBER

Grace is a totally free, unmerited gift from God necessary for our salvation. Grace is a sharing in the divine; it's God's help — the inspiration that's needed to do His will. Grace inspired martyrs in the early days of Christianity to suffer death rather than deny Christ. Grace bolstered St. Bernadette Soubirous to sustain the derision of the locals who didn't believe she'd seen the Virgin Mary. You can't see, hear, feel, smell, or taste grace because it's invisible. Catholic belief, however, maintains that grace is the life force of the soul. Like a spiritual megavitamin, grace inspires a person to selflessly conform to God's will, and like the battery in the mechanical bunny, grace keeps the soul going, going, going, and going. Because grace is a gift, you can accept or reject it; if you reject it, you won't be saved, and if you accept it, you have to put it into action.

Respecting the role of the Church and its leaders

Catholics firmly believe that Jesus Christ personally founded the Church and He entrusted it to the authority and administration of Saint Peter (the first pope) and his successors. In this section, we explain what Catholics believe the Church really is, as well as how its leadership is structured.

WHY IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S HOME IN ROME?

Saint Peter, the first pope, began his ministry in Jerusalem. Eventually, he ended up in Rome, where he was its first bishop and was then crucified and buried on Vatican Hill. That spot was imperial property, but in the fourth century, the Roman emperor donated the land and buildings to the pope in compensation for property and funds that were seized from Christians during years of Christian persecutions (a topic we discuss in Appendix A). It's important that the Church continues to have its home in the place where Saint Peter spent his final years and was bishop and pope.

What “the Church” really is

The word *church* has many meanings. Most obviously, it can signify a building where sacred worship takes place. The Catholic Church is not one particular building even though the head of the Church (the pope) lives next to Saint Peter’s Basilica (the largest church in the world) in Rome.

People who use the church building — the body or assembly of believers — are also known as the *church*. When that body is united under one tradition of worship, it is called a *liturgical church*, such as the Eastern Catholic Church, the Melkite Church, the Ruthenian Church, or the Latin or Roman Rite Church.



REMEMBER

Catholic Churches may differ liturgically, but they’re still Catholic. The two main lungs of the Church are the Latin (Western) Church and the Eastern Catholic Church. The *Latin (Western) Church* follows the ancient traditions of the Christian community in Rome since the time of St. Peter and St. Paul; most parishes in the United States, Canada, Central America, and South America celebrate this type of Mass, said in either the location’s common tongue or Latin. The *Eastern Catholic Church*, which includes the Byzantine Rite, celebrates its Mass like Greek or Russian Eastern Orthodox Churches. Both Masses are cool by the pope, though.

At an even more profound level, the entire *universal church* (meaning the Catholic Church around the world) is theologically considered the Mystical Body of Christ. In other words, the Church sees herself as the living, unifying, sanctifying, governing presence of Jesus Christ on earth today. Not just an organization with members or an institution with departments, the Church is an organic entity; it is alive. Its members, as Saint Paul says in his epistle (1 Corinthians 12:12–31), are like parts in a body. Just as your body has feet, hands, arms, legs, and so on, the Church has many members (parts) but is also one complete and whole *body*. (See Chapter 5 for a complete discussion of this topic.)

Unlike a club or association you belong to, the Church is more than an informal gathering of like-minded people with similar goals and interests. The Church was founded by Christ for a specific purpose: to save us. The Church is an extension of Jesus and continues the work begun by Him. He came to teach, sanctify, and govern God’s people as the Anointed One (called *Messiah* in Hebrew and *Christ* in Greek).



REMEMBER

The Church is necessary for salvation because she is the Mystical Body of Christ, and Christ (being the Savior and Redeemer of the World) is necessary for salvation because He is the One Mediator between God and man. People who do not formally belong to the Church are not *de facto* lost, however, because the Church believes in the universal salvific will of God. In other words, God offers salvation to all men and women, yet it is up to them to accept, believe in, and cooperate with that divine grace.

Anyone who has not consciously and deliberately rejected Christ and the Catholic Church can still be saved. In other words, besides the formal members (baptized, registered parishioners), there are many anonymous and unofficial members of the Church who act in good faith and follow their conscience, living virtuous lives. Someone may be innocently ignorant of the necessity of Christ and His Church and still achieve salvation from both.

One body with many members: That is how the Church sees herself. Her mission is to provide everything her members need — spiritually, that is. From the seven sacraments that give us grace to the Magisterium that teaches essential truths to the hierarchy that brings order through laws and governance, the Church is there to give the soul what it needs on its journey to heaven. More than a convenient option, the Church is a necessary and essential society (community) where members help each other, motivated by the same love.

The Catholic chain of command

Every group of human beings needs a chain of command (authority) and a set of rules (laws), which enable the group to maintain security, provide identity, and promote unity. Families depend on parental authority over the children. Nations have constitutions that delineate and define powers.

The Church has authority that she believes comes directly from God. For example, the Lord gave Moses not only the Ten Commandments (see Chapter 12) but also many other laws and rules to help govern God's people to keep them safe.

Canon law is the set of rules and regulations the Church enacted to protect the rights of persons and the common good of all the members. The word *hierarchy* means “leveled tier.” Like the Roman army of old, the Church adopted a chain of command. The highest authority resides in the person of the pope, who is always simultaneously the Bishop of Rome. He is the Successor of Saint Peter, the man to whom Christ entrusted the keys of the kingdom.

The pope is the Church's supreme lawmaker, judge, and visible leader. He is also called the Vicar of Christ on earth. As the Church's ambassador to the world, he possesses full, supreme, and universal power the moment he takes office. He is elected pope by the *college of cardinals*, which exists to elect a pope after the current one dies (or freely resigns) and also to advise, counsel, and assist the reigning pope (see Chapter 6).

The terms *Vatican* and *Holy See* refer to the various departments, commissions, congregations, and so on that help the pope govern the Church, evangelize and teach the faith, and maintain and promote justice.

Jesus not only entrusted the Church to Saint Peter and his successors (the popes), but He also had Twelve Apostles whose successors are called *bishops*. A bishop shepherds a local church called a *diocese*, whereas the pope shepherds the universal, global Church around the world.

Bishops are helped in each parish church by a pastor who is a priest, and often they are helped by a deacon and/or a parochial vicar (assistant pastor). The bishops of a nation or geographical region form Episcopal conferences, which provide the benefit of pooled resources. For the complete scoop on the Church hierarchy, be sure to check out Chapter 6.

Worshipping as a Catholic: The Holy Mass

The second pillar of faith in the Catholic religion is the seven sacraments — or in more general terms, divine worship of God as celebrated in the sacred liturgy (the topic of Part 2 of this book). The ceremonies, rituals, and rites performed for the past 2,000+ years were developed by the Church to render worship of the Almighty, to teach the faith to the believers, and to give moral guidance on how to live that faith. The seven sacraments are the most sacred and ancient Catholic rites; they mark the seven major stages of spiritual development:

- » **Baptism:** You are born.
- » **Holy Eucharist:** You are fed.
- » **Confirmation:** You grow.
- » **Penance:** You need healing.
- » **Anointing of the Sick:** You recover.
- » **Matrimony:** You need family.
- » **Holy Orders:** You need leaders.

Because humans have five senses and can't physically see what's happening in the spiritual realm, the seven sacraments involve physical, tangible *symbols* (such as the water used in Baptism, the oil for anointing, and unleavened bread and wine). Symbols help connect us to the invisible spiritual reality, the *divine grace* (God's gift of unconditional love) given in each sacrament. (For more on the seven sacraments, see Chapters 8 and 9.) Catholics belong to their own churches, called *parishes*, which are local places of worship. The *Holy Mass*, the Catholic daily and weekly church service, is a reenactment of *Holy Thursday* (when Jesus celebrated the Last Supper) and *Good Friday* (when He died to purchase the rewards of eternal life in heaven for humankind). In Chapter 10, we explain the Mass in detail.



WARNING

Sunday attendance at a parish isn't just expected; it's a moral obligation. Not going to Sunday Mass without a worthy excuse, such as illness or bad weather, is considered a grave sin. (Note that many Christians attend church services on Sunday, but Catholics can also attend Mass on Saturday evening instead to fulfill the Sunday requirement, as we explain in Chapter 10.)

Bringing body and soul into the mix

As we detail in Chapter 7, human beings are created as an essential union of body and soul. Material and spiritual worlds are bridged in each and every human person. Because God made us this way, it only makes sense that both body and soul are incorporated in worship.

Attending Mass requires more than just being physically present in church. That's why Catholics use different postures, such as standing, sitting, kneeling, and bowing, and do plenty of listening, singing, and responding to phrases. For example, if the priest says, "The Lord be with you," Catholics respond, "And with your spirit."

During Mass, the inspired Word of God (see Chapter 2) is read, proclaimed, and heard through people's eyes, lips, and ears. Holy Communion, food for the soul, is given to believers.

Sacred art adorns the worship space (such as stained glass, statues, icons, paintings, mosaics, tapestries, and frescoes), sacred music is played and sung, bells are rung, incense is burned . . . the senses are stimulated as body and soul are united and nourished in the House of God.

Participating inside and out

Catholics are not spectators while at public worship. Yes, there is a distinction between the *clergy* (ordained ministers who perform the sacred rites and rituals in the name of the Church) and the congregants, but the people in the pews are crucial because they represent the entire human race.

Everyone in the church is asked to get involved in sacred liturgy. Divine worship is the adoration of God by man, and *interior* participation is the most important element. Every person at Mass should be open to God's grace to accept and cooperate with it. Interior participation means going to church not for what you get out of it but for what you can give to God.

Of all the sacraments and all the sacred liturgies, the Mass is par excellence, the source and summit of Christian worship. It is more than a mere reenactment of the Last Supper; it is the unbloody re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary (Good Friday).

Mass is first and foremost sacred worship, but it also teaches and supports what Catholics believe in terms of the doctrines and dogmas that form the creed of the religion. Mass communicates religious truths and encourages parishioners to respond morally and spiritually by living holy lives.

Behaving Like a Catholic

The third pillar of the Catholic faith is the Ten Commandments, which represent the moral life of the believer. Behaving as Jesus would want us to is the basic premise. The concept is not puritanical; fun and enjoyment aren't frowned upon. All legitimate pleasures are allowed in moderation — and only if they aren't an end in themselves. The individual's goal is to maintain a happy balance of work and leisure.

As we explain in this section, there are certain activities the Church recommends and encourages, and some she requires and demands. In all places and at all times, being docile to the will of God is paramount. For much more detail about how to behave like a Catholic, be sure to check out Part 3 of this book.

Following the general ground rules

The minimum requirements for being a Catholic are called the *precepts* of the Church:

- » Attending Mass every Sunday (or Saturday evening) and holy day of obligation.
- » Going to confession annually or more often (or when needed).
- » Receiving Holy Communion during Easter. (Receiving weekly or daily Holy Communion is encouraged, though.)
- » Observing laws on fasting and abstinence: one full meal on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; not eating meat on Fridays during Lent.
- » Supporting the Church financially and otherwise.

And, in the United States, the American bishops added two more precepts:

- » Obeying the marriage laws of the Church.
- » Supporting missionary activity of the Church.

You can find out more about the precepts of the Church in Chapter 11.

Catholics are also required to pray daily, participate in the sacraments, obey the moral law, and accept the teachings of Christ and His Church. If you haven't grown up knowing and accepting the faith, then you need to make sure you know and agree with all that the Catholic Church teaches before you can truly practice the faith.

Practicing the faith is the most difficult part of being Catholic. Obeying the rules isn't just mindless compliance. It involves appreciating the wisdom and value of the various Catholic rules and laws. Believers are asked to put that belief into action, to practice what they believe. Catholics are taught that all men and women are made in the image and likeness of God and that all men and women have been saved by Christ and are adopted children of God. That belief, if truly believed, requires that the person act as if she really means it.



Every organization, society, association, and group has rules. Even individual families and homes have their own rules, which exist for one purpose: the common good of all the members. Just like directions on a bottle of medicine tell you the proper use of something, Church laws are signs that warn you of danger and give you the proper directions to your destination. The laws of God — be they the Ten Commandments, the Natural Moral Law, or the moral teachings of the Church — exist to protect us and to ensure our spiritual safety.

Avoiding sin

Sin is not only breaking the law of God but also much more. Sin is a disease, a germ, an infection of the soul. Just as tumors can be either benign or malignant, sins can be either venial or mortal, either slightly wounding or actually killing the life of grace in the soul.

The best prevention is to avoid sin just as doctors advise us to avoid disease. Good spiritual health requires more than being free of infection, however. Living a virtuous moral life and maintaining a healthy spirituality, when combined with an aggressive program to avoid sin at all cost, is the best plan to live a holy life worthy of a true follower of Christ. In Chapter 13, we discuss this subject in detail.

Heeding the Church's stance on tough issues

Certain topics get much more media attention than the substance of Catholic religion (like doctrine, worship, prayer, and spirituality). These topics include the Church's stance on abortion, euthanasia, contraception, homosexuality, and more.

Many of the tough issues that distinguish Catholicism from other faiths are based on the Church's foundational beliefs. Issues such as priestly celibacy are matters of discipline, whereas the ordination of women contradicts a doctrine of the faith. Abortion, euthanasia, contraception, and homosexuality are moral issues that require the application of biblical and doctrinal principals in order to see clearly the spiritual dangers often overlooked by well-meaning people. War and capital punishment are examples where legitimate differences of opinions still exist, yet basic fundamentals must always be respected and upheld. We devote Chapter 14 to a discussion of all these tough issues.

Praying as a Catholic: Showing Your Devotion

Part 4 of this book is devoted to a discussion of prayer and devotions. While public worship (such as the Holy Mass) is governed by the official Church, private prayer is more a matter of personal taste and preference. Each person needs to cultivate his own spirituality just as he needs to develop a healthy lifestyle for his body.

When it comes to prayer, what works for one person may not work for another, but certain fundamentals almost always apply. Think of it this way: Your choices with regard to diet and exercise may differ from those of your friends and neighbors, but chances are your choices have a lot in common with those made by people of similar physical health. Likewise, your devotional choices (such as how and when to pray) can be tailored to meet your needs, but many similarities exist among people who share a certain faith.

Praying and using devotions

As we discuss in detail in Chapter 15, Catholicism promotes both public and private prayer. In Chapter 16, we explain that *devotions* are prayers or actions devoted to God, which can be private or public as well. Devotions are minor ways that believers cultivate a love and familiarity with theological truths and revealed

mysteries of faith and (most importantly) develop a personal relationship with the Lord. The devotions mentioned in Chapter 16, such as praying the Rosary, are some of the more popular and effective ones around.

Realizing the importance of Mary and the saints

The Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus, and she is also considered one of His most faithful disciples in her own way. While not an Apostle and never holding any authority in the early Church, the Mother of Christ nonetheless has always been a model of humility, virtue, and obedience to the will of God.

As we explain in Chapters 17 and 18, Mary and the canonized saints of the Church are not objects of worship (which would be idolatry — something condemned by the First Commandment). Instead, they are living examples and models of holiness and sanctity. They are role models and heroes of faith who, in their own way, tried and succeeded in following Jesus as best they could.

Following traditions

The most visible aspects of Catholicism are not usually the most fundamental theological, doctrinal, or moral teachings. In other words, they aren't necessarily the meat-and-potatoes substance of what it means to be Catholic. But some traditions are so public or well known that people associate them with Catholicism much like people associate Judaism with a man wearing a yarmulke or Islam with the use of a prayer rug.

Some such Catholic traditions include meatless Fridays, ashes on the forehead to begin Lent, palms on Passion Sunday, and blessings (of throats, persons, homes, cars, and so on). Such pious practices are not the core of Catholicism, but they do connect and point in that direction, as we explain in Chapter 19.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Defining the real, practical meaning of faith
- » Discovering the ways God reveals truth
- » Believing in the written and spoken Word of God
- » Using reason to defend what you believe

Chapter 2

Having Faith in God's Revealed Word

You may think that having faith is similar to believing in fairy tales, UFOs, ghosts, abominable snowmen, the Loch Ness monster, or Bigfoot. But faith is something entirely different. Faith is not the enemy of reason — it is merely above reason. In this chapter, we tell you what faith really is and explain all the divine truths that Catholics believe in. We also sum up some proofs for God's existence that will make your faith stronger.

As Saint Augustine testifies, “I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe” (Sermo 43:9). Although reason is a powerful gift, it is still just a natural gift that provides limited results. Faith informs reason. In this chapter, we tell you what faith really is and explain all the divine truths that Catholics believe in. We also sum up some proofs for God's existence that will make your faith stronger.

How Do You Know If You Have Faith?

St. Thomas Aquinas (theologian of the 13th century) said faith was the assent given by the mind (intellect) to what cannot be seen or proven but is taken on the word and authority of another. The ascertainment of faith is plain and simple: You have *faith* if you trust the word of someone else. When you take what someone says on faith, you believe in what the other person is telling you even though you haven't personally witnessed it, may not understand it, or may find it difficult to believe. In other words, faith means agreeing with, believing in, *trusting* something — without cold, hard evidence — that you can't know or comprehend on your own.

So far, faith doesn't sound all that different from believing in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, but having faith is a bit more complicated. Having faith means being able to live with unanswered questions — sometimes, tough ones. For example, why does evil exist in the world? Why do people still go to war? And what about the existence of terrorism, disease, and crime? Faith doesn't answer all these questions. (Some people think that the answer "It's God's will" suffices, but it doesn't.) Faith, however, gives you the strength and ability to endure unanswerable questions. Instead of providing a set of solutions to painful and complicated enigmas, faith provides the means to persevere.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a book defining the official teachings of the Catholic Church, has this to say about faith:

- » "Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a *free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*." (150)
- » "Faith is a personal act — the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself. But faith isn't an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone." (166)



REMEMBER

To Catholics, faith is a supernatural virtue given to human beings from God. What we do or don't do with that faith is totally up to us. God offers it freely to anyone and everyone, but it must be freely received as well. No one can be forced to have or accept faith. And when it's presented, each individual responds differently — at different levels, at different times, and in different ways. Some reject it, some ignore it, and some treat it casually. Others cherish their faith deeply. As the adage goes: For those who believe, no explanation is necessary, and for those who do not believe, no explanation is possible.

Having Faith in Revelation

Catholic faith involves more than just believing that God exists. It's about believing *in* God as well as *whatever* God has revealed. Objectively, you can look at faith as the sum total of the truths God reveals, which form the basis for the doctrines of the Church and are often called the *deposit of faith* — the doctrines of the Church. Subjectively, you can consider faith as your personal response (*assent*) to those revealed truths.

We hear ya: “But what do you mean by revealed truths? And, for that matter, just what *are* God's revealed truths?” By *revealed truths*, we mean *revelations*, God's unveiling of supernatural truths necessary for human salvation. (The word *revelation* comes from the Latin *revelare*, meaning to *unveil*.) Some of these are truths that you could never know by science or philosophy; the human mind is incapable of knowing them without divine intervention, so God revealed them to mere mortals. For example, the revealed truth of the Holy Trinity is that there is only one God but three persons (not three gods, mind you). This truth is something that the human intellect could never discover on its own; God had to tell that one himself.

Other revelations, such as the existence of God, can be known by using human reason alone (see the section “Backing Up Your Faith with Reason: Summa Theologica” in this chapter), but God reveals these truths directly anyway because not everyone understands them at the same time and in the same way. The essence of these revelations can be — and is presumed to be — knowable to anyone with the use of reason; so, for example, someone can't claim he didn't know it was wrong to commit murder. But because of original sin (see Chapter 8), some of the applications and distinctions of these basic truths require more reasoning and thinking. To even out the playing field, God revealed some important truths so that even those people who aren't intelligent or quick-minded won't be caught off guard.



REMEMBER

As for what God's revealed truths are, the most concise answer is *His word*. *The Word of God* is the revelation of God to His people. What is the Word of God? Catholics believe that the Word of God comes in two forms:

- » **The written word:** Known also as *Scripture* or the *Bible*
- » **The spoken word:** Also called the *unwritten word* or *Sacred Tradition*

Both the spoken and the written word come from the same source and communicate the same message — the truth. The written word and the spoken word of God

are not in competition with one another, nor do Catholics believe one at the expense of the other. Rather, the written word and the spoken word have a mutual partnership. Whenever and wherever the Bible is silent on an issue or its meaning is ambiguous or disputed, the spoken word (Sacred Tradition) steps in to clarify the matter. Catholics believe that God's word reflects what's in His mind, and because God is all truth and all good, His word conveys truth and goodness. Catholics have deep respect for and devotion to the Word of God.

Faith in the written word: The Bible

Catholicism is a biblical religion. Like all Christian religions, it cherishes the Bible as the inspired, infallible, inerrant, and revealed Word of God.

Having faith in the following aspects of the Bible is crucial to being Catholic:

- » The belief in the Bible as one of the two channels of revelation
- » The literal and figurative interpretation of the biblical text
- » The belief in the Catholic Bible as the most authoritative text

Believing in two forms of revelation

Catholic Christianity and Eastern Orthodox Christianity believe in one common source of divine revelation (God himself), but they believe the revelation is transmitted to us through two equal and distinct modes: the written word (the Bible) and the spoken word (the *unwritten word*). Protestant Christianity regards the Bible as the only source of divine revelation. Another way of looking at it is to think of some Christians as seeing only one channel of revelation — *sola scriptura*, which is Latin for *Scripture alone* — and Catholic Christians as seeing two channels of revelation — both the written word and the unwritten word of God. (Just divert thine eyes to the “Faith in the spoken word: Sacred Tradition” section, later in this chapter, for an explanation of what the unwritten word is.)

Interpreting sacred literature both literally and figuratively

Catholics regard the Bible as the inspired and revealed word of God, but it's also seen as a collection of sacred literature. Rather than just looking at the Bible as one big book, Catholicism treats the Bible as a collection of smaller books under one cover: the Word of God written by men yet inspired by God. Since the time of

the Reformation, opinion on the interpretation of the sacred text has differed significantly. Some Christians hold for a literal interpretation of every word and phrase of Scripture; other Christians hold for a faithful interpretation, which is sometimes literal and sometimes not. (In other words, some text is meant to be interpreted figuratively.) Catholics belong to the second camp.

The Bible tells the history of salvation, but it's much more than a history book. It contains the Psalms of David — songs that the King wrote in honor of God — yet the Bible is much more than a hymnal. It contains poetry, prose, history, theology, imagery, metaphor, analogy, irony, hyperbole, and so on. Because it's not exclusively one form of literature, as you would have in a science textbook, one needs to know and appreciate the various literary forms in the Bible in order to interpret it as the author intended. For example, when Jesus says in the Gospel (Mark 9:43), "And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off," the Catholic Church has interpreted that to be a *figure of speech* rather than something to be taken *literally*. At the same time, Catholicism interprets literally the passage of John 6:55 — "For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed." Because individuals can disagree on what should be interpreted literally and what shouldn't, Catholicism resorts to one final authority to definitively interpret for all Catholics what the biblical text means for the Catholic faith. That ultimate authority is called the *Magisterium* (from the Latin word *magister* meaning *teacher*), which is the authority of the pope and the bishops around the world in union with him to instruct the faithful. (For more on the Magisterium, see Chapter 6.) Catholics believe that Christ founded the Church ("I will build my Church" [Matthew 16:18]), a necessary institution, to safeguard and protect revelation by authentically interpreting the biblical texts. The Church is not superior to Scripture, but she's the steward and guardian as well as interpreter of the inspired and revealed Word of God. The Church assumes the role of authentic interpreter not on her own but by the authority given her by Christ: "He who hears you, hears me" (Luke 10:16). The Church makes an authentic interpretation and an authoritative decision regarding those issues that aren't explicitly addressed in Sacred Scripture, but only because Christ has entrusted her to do so. To find out how the Church views tough modern-day issues that aren't addressed in the Bible, flip to Chapter 14.

Trusting the authority of the Catholic Bible

What follows is a snapshot of how the Bible was created and how different versions evolved — the Catholic versions and the Protestant versions. If you're eager for more information on the Bible, however, check out *The Bible For Dummies* by Jeffrey Geoghegan and Michael Homan (Wiley, 2016).

BIBLE TRIVIA

Want a few interesting Bible tidbits? You got it:

The word *bible* isn't even in the Bible. Do a word search on your computer, and you'll see that nowhere from Genesis to the Apocalypse (Revelation) is the word *bible* ever mentioned. But the word *Scripture* appears 53 times in the King James Version of the Bible, and the phrase *Word of God* appears 55 times. So if the word itself isn't in the Bible, why call it the Bible? The word comes from the Greek *biblia*, meaning a collection of books, and the origin goes back even farther to the word *biblos*, meaning papyrus. In ancient times, the paper from trees to write on didn't exist — only stone or papyrus. Imagine — stone books.

The Catholic Church gave the name *Bible* to the Bible — to the collection of inspired books known as the Old and New Testaments. The Church also decided which books belonged in the Bible and which were left out, because nowhere from Genesis to Apocalypse (Revelation) can you find a list of which documents belong and which don't. Modern-day Bible publishers and editors have added the table of contents, but the contents weren't disclosed in the sacred text itself. Why does the Bible contain four Gospels? Who decided that Matthew should come before Mark? Why isn't the Gospel of Thomas or the Gospel of Peter in the Bible? Who says that the New Testament contains only 27 books? What happened to the Apocalypse of Moses and the Apocalypse of Adam? The Bible doesn't tell you what books belong in it, so the Church had to use her authority to make that decision. You can read more on this subject in the nearby section "Trusting the authority of the Catholic Bible."

To understand the history of the Bible, you really have to go back to around 1800 B.C. when the oral tradition of the Hebrew people started, because Abraham and his tribes were nomadic people and didn't have a written language of their own. Mothers and fathers verbally (*orally*) handed down the stories of the Old Testament about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and so on. (The Latin word *traditio* means to hand down, and it's the root of the English word for *tradition*.) The stories of the Old Testament were all told by word of mouth, which we call *oral tradition*.

Moses appeared sometime around 1250 B.C., when God delivered the Hebrew people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt and they entered the Promised Land. The era of Moses opened the road to some of the written word because Moses was raised in the court of Pharaoh, where he learned how to read and write. But the predominant bulk of revelation was still the oral tradition, handed down from generation to generation, because the rest of the Hebrews were slaves and most were unable to read or write at that time. Substantial writings weren't saved until 950 B.C., during the reign of King Solomon. But after his death, King Solomon's

kingdom was divided between the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah, respectively.

The Assyrians conquered Israel in 721 B.C., and the Babylonians conquered Judah in 587 B.C. During the time of the Babylonian captivity and exile, the Jews of the *Diaspora* (forced exile of Jews) were spread all over the known world. Some retained their Hebrew language, but most lost it and adopted the common language: Greek. (If you could read and write at this time in history, most likely you were reading and writing Greek.)

Consequently, in the year 250 B.C., an effort was underway to translate all Jewish Scripture into the Greek language. The thing is, more Jews lived outside of Palestine than within it. In the third century B.C., nearly two-fifths of the population in Egypt alone, especially in Alexandria, was Jewish and yet unable to read and write in Hebrew. These Greek-speaking Jews were known as *Hellenistic Jews*. Seven books of Scripture were written in Greek by these Hellenistic Jews and were considered as inspired as the 39 Scriptural books written in Hebrew before the Diaspora.

The Greek version of the Old Testament was called the *Septuagint* (symbolized by the Roman numeral LXX for the number 70) because it took 70 scholars allegedly 70 years to complete the task. They met in Alexandria, Egypt, and translated 39 Hebrew Scriptures into Greek and included 7 other books originally written by Jews in the Greek language.

These seven books — the Books of Baruch, Maccabees I and II, Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus (also known as *Sirach*), and Wisdom — were known and used by Jews even in the Holy Land, including Jesus and His disciples. The early Christians likewise accepted the inspired status of these seven books because no one had refuted them during the time of Christ. Because they were later additions to the more ancient Hebrew writings, however, these seven books were called the *Deuterocanonical Books* (meaning *second canon*); the 39 Hebrew books were known as the *Canonical Books*.

Jewish authorities in Jerusalem had no explicit objection to these seven books until the year A.D. 100, well after the Christians had split from formal Judaism and formed their own separate religion. The Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, and in the year A.D. 100, Jewish leaders at the Council of Jamnia sought to purify Judaism of all foreign and Gentile influence, which meant removing anything not purely Hebrew. Because the seven Deuterocanonical Books were never written in Hebrew, they got pitched.

By now, though, Christianity was totally separate from Judaism and didn't doubt the authenticity of the 7 books, because these books were always considered equal

to the other 39. (Much later, Martin Luther would initiate the Protestant Reformation in 1517 and choose to adopt the Hebrew canon [39 books] rather than the Greek canon [46 books], also called the Septuagint.)

So, in the listing of the Old Testament, a discrepancy exists between the Catholic and the Protestant Bibles. Catholic Bibles list 46 books and Protestant Bibles list 39. Recently, many publishers have reintroduced the seven books in Protestant Bibles, such as the King James Version, but they're carefully placed in the back (after the end of the canonical texts) and are identified as being part of the *Apocrypha*, which is from the Greek word *apokryphos* meaning *hidden*.

So what the Catholic Church considers Deuterocanonical, Protestant theologians consider Apocrypha. And what the Catholic Church considers Apocrypha, Protestants call *Pseudepigrapha* (meaning *false writings*), which are the alleged and so-called Lost Books of the Bible. These Lost Books were never considered as being inspired by the Church, so they were never included as part of any Bible, Catholic or Protestant. Such books as the Assumption of Moses, the Apocalypse of Abraham, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Acts of St. John, and others were all considered uninspired and therefore never made it into the Bible.

Interestingly enough, Catholics and Protestants have never seriously disputed the list of the New Testament books, and both the Catholic and the Protestant Bibles have the exact same names and number (27) of books in the New Testament. (For more info about the New Testament, see Chapter 4.)

Faith in the spoken word: Sacred Tradition

God's word is more than letters on a page or sounds to the ear. His word is *creative*. When God speaks the Word, it happens. For example, the book of Genesis in the Bible tells us that God created merely by saying the Word: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." (Genesis 1:3)

Catholics believe that the Word of God is found not only in the Bible but also in the unwritten or spoken word — *Sacred Tradition*. In this section, we show you what Sacred Tradition is and introduce you to the single most important part of that tradition, the Creed.

Filling in the gaps of the written word

Before the Word was written, it was first spoken. God first said, "Let there be light," and later on, the sacred author wrote those words on paper. Jesus first spoke the Word when He preached His Sermon on the Mount. He didn't dictate to Matthew as He was preaching. Instead, Matthew wrote things down much later,

well after Jesus died, rose, and ascended into heaven. None of the Gospels were written during Jesus's life on earth. He died in A.D. 33, and the earliest Gospel manuscript, which is the Aramaic version of Matthew (alluded to by ancient sources), was written between A.D. 40 and 50. The other three Gospels — Mark, Luke, and John — were written between A.D. 53 and 100. Matthew and John, who wrote the first and the last Gospels, were 2 of the original 12 apostles, so they personally heard what Jesus said and saw with their own eyes what He did. Mark and Luke weren't apostles but disciples, and most of their information on what Jesus said and did wasn't a first-hand eyewitness account; rather, their information was handed down to them by others who were witnesses. (Remember that the word *tradition* means *to hand down*.) The unwritten or spoken Gospel was told by word of mouth by the apostles well before the *evangelists*, the Gospel writers, ever wrote one word. Luke received much of his data from Jesus's mother, the Virgin Mary, and Mark received plenty of info from Peter, the apostle Jesus left in charge.

If some time passed between what Jesus actually said and did and when the Gospel writers put His words and actions on paper (actually on parchment), what took place during that period? Before the written word was the unwritten, or spoken, word. In the Old Testament, things happened and were said long before they were written down. So, too, in the New Testament, Jesus preached His sermons and worked His miracles, died on the Cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven long before anyone wrote it down. No one took notes while He preached. No letters were written between Jesus and the apostles. Sacred Tradition predates and precedes Sacred Scripture, but both come from the same source: God.

The New Testament is totally silent on whether Jesus ever married or had children. The Bible says nothing about His marital status, yet Christians believe He had neither a wife nor kids. Sacred Tradition tells that He never married, just as Sacred Tradition says that the Gospels number only four. Without a written list, who decides (and how) if the Old Testament contains 39 books in Protestant Bibles or 46 books in Catholic Bibles and the New Testament has 27? If Catholics were to believe only in the written word, then no answer would exist. But another avenue exists, the unwritten word, and we can go by that.

Existing separately from human tradition



REMEMBER

Catholicism carefully distinguishes between mere human tradition and divinely inspired Sacred Tradition:

» **Human traditions** are man-made laws that can be changed. An example of a human tradition is Catholics not eating meat on Fridays during Lent. Celibacy for priests of the Western (Latin) Church is another human tradition, which any pope can dispense, modify, or continue.

» **Sacred Tradition** is considered part of the unwritten Word of God because it has been believed for centuries, since the time of the Apostolic Church, which refers to that period of time in Church history from the first (while the Apostles were still alive) to the second century A.D. (before the second-generation Christians died). It's called *Apostolic* because the apostles lived at that time.

An example of a Sacred Tradition is the dogma of the Assumption of Mary. A *dogma* is a revealed truth that's solemnly defined by the Church — a formal doctrine that the faithful are obligated to believe. Although it's not explicit in Sacred Scripture, the Assumption of Mary means that Mary was *assumed* (physically taken up), body and soul, into heaven by her divine Son. Even though it wasn't solemnly defined until 1950 by Pope Pius XII, this doctrine has been believed (and never doubted) by Catholic Christians since the time of the apostles. Other examples of Sacred Tradition can be found in the doctrines defined by the 21 General or Ecumenical Councils of the Church, from Nicea (A.D. 325) to Vatican II (1962–1965). (See Chapter 6 for more on the councils.)

The Creed

The most crucial and influential part of Sacred Tradition is the creed. The word comes from the Latin *credo*, meaning “I believe.” A creed is a statement or profession of what members of a particular church or religion believe as being essential and necessary. The two most ancient and most important creeds are the *Apostles' Creed* and the *Nicene Creed*; the latter is recited or sung every Sunday and on holy days of obligation at Catholic Masses all over the world. (Like Sundays, *holy days of obligation* are specific days in the calendar year on which Catholics are required to go to Mass. See Chapter 10 for more on holy days.) The *Nicene Creed* was the fruit of the Council of Nicea, which convened in A.D. 325 to condemn the heresy of Arianism (see Chapter 4) and to affirm the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. The oldest creed, however, is the *Apostles' Creed*. Although it's doubtful that the 12 apostles themselves wrote it, the origin of this creed comes from the first century A.D.

A sophisticated development of the *Apostles' Creed*, which is a Christian statement of belief attributed to the 12 apostles, the *Nicene Creed* reflects one's loyalty and allegiance to the truths contained in it. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the Creed is one of the four pillars of faith, along with the Ten Commandments, the seven sacraments, and the Our Father. The text of the *Apostles' Creed* and the *Nicene Creed*, which follows, succinctly summarizes all that Catholicism regards as divinely revealed truth:

The Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the 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 into hell. On the third day He arose again

from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The following list explains the Apostles' Creed in detail, so you can get a better understanding of this Sacred Tradition and the Catholic belief system. (It's divided into 12 articles for easier digestion.)

» **Article 1: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.** This affirms that God exists, that He's one God in three persons, known as the Holy Trinity, and that He created the known universe.

Creation is understood as making something from nothing. The created world includes all inanimate matter, as well as plant, animal, human, and angelic life.

» **Article 2: And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.** This attests that Jesus is the Son of God and that He's most certainly divine. The word *Lord* implies divinity, because the Greek word *Kyrios* and the Hebrew word *Adonai* both mean *Lord* and are only ascribed to God. So the use of *Lord* with *Jesus* is meant to profess His divinity. The name *Jesus* comes from the Hebrew word *Jeshua*, meaning *God saves*. So Catholics believe that Jesus is Savior.

» **Article 3: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit [and] born of the Virgin Mary.** This affirms the human nature of Christ, meaning that He had a real, true human mother, and it also affirms His divine nature, meaning that He had no human father, but by the power of the Holy Spirit He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Therefore, He's considered both God and man by Christians — fully divine and fully human.

IF YOU'RE CATHOLIC, YOU GOTTA GO PUBLIC

When you profess the faith, that is. At the Baptism of an infant, the parents and godparents are asked, "Do you renounce Satan, and all his works and all his empty promises?" (If the person being baptized is at the age of reason, 7 or older, he is asked the question directly.) If the answer is yes, then the priest or deacon proceeds with, "Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth?" And so on.

After Baptism, Christians — when they're at the age of reason — are expected to publicly profess the faith by reciting or singing the Nicene Creed at Mass with the entire congregation. Want to know more about what happens at Baptism? Head over to Chapter 8.

WHAT'S IN A LAST NAME?

Jesus's last name wasn't Christ. So even if mailboxes existed back in His time, a mailbox wouldn't have listed the names Jesus, Mary, and Joseph Christ. *Christ* is a title meaning *anointed* from the Greek word *christos*. The Hebrew word *Messiah* also means *anointed*.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The union of the two natures in the one divine person of Christ is called the *Incarnation* from the Latin word *caro* meaning *flesh*. The Latin word *Incarnatio* or *Incarnation* in English translates to *becoming flesh*.

» **Article 4: [He] suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.** The human nature of Christ could feel pain and actually die, and He did on Good Friday. The mention of Pontius Pilate by name wasn't meant so much to vilify him forever in history but to place the Crucifixion within human history. So reference is made to an actual historical person, the Roman governor of Judea appointed by Caesar, to put the life and death of Jesus within a chronological and historical context. It also reminds the faithful that one can't blame all Jews for the death of Jesus, as some have erroneously done over the ages. Certain Jewish leaders conspired against Jesus, but a Roman gave the actual death sentence, and Roman soldiers carried it out. So both Jew and Gentile alike shared in the spilling of innocent blood. Any and all anti-Semitism is repugnant and cannot be based on the Crucifixion of Jesus.

» **Article 5: He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead.** The *hell* Jesus descended into wasn't the hell of the damned, where Christians believe that the devil and his demons reside. *Hell* was also a word that Jews and ancient Christians used to describe the place of the dead, both the good and the bad. Before salvation and redemption, the souls of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Esther, Ruth, and so on, all had to wait in the abode of the dead, until the Redeemer could open the gates of heaven once more. They weren't paroled from hell for good behavior.

This passage affirms that on the third day He *rose*, meaning Jesus came back from the dead of His own divine power. He wasn't just clinically dead for a few minutes, He was *dead* dead; then He rose from the dead. More than a resuscitated corpse, Jesus possessed a glorified and risen *body*.

» **Article 6: He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.** The Ascension reminds the faithful that after the human and divine natures of Christ were united in the Incarnation, they could never be separated. In other words, after the saving death and Resurrection, Jesus didn't dump His human body as if He didn't need it anymore. Catholicism teaches that His human body will exist forever. Where Jesus went, body and soul, into heaven, the faithful hope one day to follow.