

Our Catholic Faith Series 2017

Week 1- January 14 & 15, 2017

Our Catholic Faith is a series of responses to questions being raised in our local faith community. We hope these responses will help deepen your understanding of our Catholic faith, strengthen your commitment and draw you closer to Jesus himself.

Do Catholics believe and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior? Yes, we certainly do, is the short answer. Some faith traditions suggest that unless you make a commitment to Jesus saying the specific words “I accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior” you cannot be saved. And yet, Jesus is the one who saves, and Jesus can save anyone.

In our Catholic faith, we experience sacred moments where individuals make a commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus, particularly in receiving the sacraments. We believe sacraments are sacred actions instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which faith is expressed and strengthened, worship is rendered to God and the sanctification of humankind is effected through God’s grace.

In Baptism, the gate to the sacraments, men and women are freed from their sins, reborn as children of God and, configured to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church. In the sacrament of Confirmation, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are bound more perfectly to the Church; it strengthens and obliges us more firmly to be witnesses to Christ by word and deed, and to share and defend the gift of faith. The Most Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian worship where we receive Jesus himself, his Body and his Blood. The Eucharist in our Catholic faith is not merely table fellowship, but the memorial of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, our great prayer of thanksgiving for all that God has done, and where we are offered and receive the very Body and Blood of Christ.

In each of the sacraments we not only make an assent of faith, but a deep commitment to the Lord Jesus. Parents and godparents help us make this commitment of faith in Baptism and First Holy Communion. Confirmation is the time we are asked to stand on our own conviction and commit ourselves more deeply to the Lord Jesus. And each time we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, we say “Amen,” “yes it is” Jesus himself. Every time we receive Holy Communion, we say yes to Jesus accepting him as our Lord and Savior and pledging our lives to him.

May the sacraments deepen and strengthen our faith and draw us ever closer to the Lord Jesus.

Contagiously Catholic is coming Wednesday, February 22, 2017, at 7 PM. Watch for details.

Week 2- January 21-22, 2017

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Baptism – the indelible mark. Can a person be rebaptized? Most mainline Christian churches such as Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist, believe, profess and teach the indelible

mark of baptism and do not rebaptize. In the Catholic Church, we believe that baptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. It incorporates us into the Church or as our IC school children proudly say, makes us “God’s holy boys and girls, one big happy family.” Given once for all, baptism is not repeated.

While baptism is not repeated, there may be deep and defining spiritual moments that sometimes occur in our lives; significant moments where we experience a rebirth of faith, or a coming home to the Lord; encounters with the Lord himself that transform our lives completely. These are wonderful gifts and blessings from the Lord that are cause for celebration and recommitment, but not rebaptism that suggests our baptism in the Lord was somehow lacking. How might one celebrate these amazing moments of grace from the Lord? If we lost our way or drifted from the Lord in sinful ways, our celebration may be the sacrament of reconciliation. It may seem odd to think of reconciliation as a celebration, and yet recall stories of Jesus finding the lost and offering forgiveness such as the lost sheep or the prodigal son. Each person coming home to the Lord is invited to celebrate the amazing gift of forgiveness and being found. Significant moments may be celebrated with a blessing from the Lord – blessing of a marriage after a rocky time or blessing for beginning a new journey in life. They could be marked by a special journey or pilgrimage to a church or shrine, spending time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Or it could be celebrated by recommitting oneself through a profession of faith.

The indelible mark of baptism is obvious when a person from another faith tradition becomes a member of the Catholic Church at the East vigil. Their baptism in another church is respected and they are received into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church receiving the sacrament of Confirmation and First Holy Communion.

Each time we enter the church, we dip our fingers in holy water and make the sign of the cross as a reminder of our baptism. May our baptism always remind us of our commitment to the Lord Jesus and draw us closer to him.

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Week 3- January 28 & 29, 2017

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Experiencing the Lord Jesus through the tradition of the Catholic Church. The word tradition comes from Latin and Greek words that mean transmission. Tradition refers to the transmission of beliefs, doctrines, rituals and entities such as sacred scripture. It is the way that we pass on what is truly important in the Catholic Church.

While many Protestant churches claim that the Bible is the only rule of faith, the Catholic Church has always held that both sacred Scripture (the Bible) and sacred Tradition (the teaching authority of the Church) are necessary for transmitting or passing on the gift of faith. Jesus not only gave us His words and actions to know faith and share faith (sacred Scripture), he also gave us His apostles, entrusted with the responsibility of helping us understand faith throughout time and how to pass that gift along (sacred Tradition). The

Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that “sacred Tradition is the true Faith itself, given to the Apostles by Christ and faithfully transmitted to each new generation.”

Part of our Catholic tradition is the way we worship, the prayers that we say, the gestures that we use, the devotions that we follow. The Mass is our primary form of worship fulfilling God’s command to keep holy the Sabbath and the command of Jesus spoken in Luke 22:19-20: “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after supper, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” Jesus himself has given us his very body and blood and calls us to join in the great prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharist that we do in memory of him. The Mass is a perfect blend of sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition.

Truly, Jesus is present in the tradition of the Catholic Church, in sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, in the way that we transmit the gift of faith and in the way that we worship. Each Eucharist, God calls us to holiness, strengthens our faith, nourishes and sends us, in order to grow in communion, in unity, with one another and with God. May the Eucharist draw us more closely to Jesus himself and send us forth to be his heralds of faith and hope in the world.

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Week 4- February 4 & 5, 2017

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What makes the Catholic mass different from other faith traditions?

Transubstantiation and Real Presence. Transubstantiation means that the very substance of bread and wine is changed. We in the Catholic Church uniquely believe that the gifts of bread and wine, used in the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist, are not merely symbols, but actually become the body and blood of Christ at the consecration by the ordained priest (Transubstantiation). This is based on 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Christ’s presence as the sacred elements is called Real Presence.

We have noted in our recent dialogue sessions commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation that the Lutheran church is closest to the Catholic Church regarding the Eucharist. Lutherans believe that there is a sacramental union of the bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ. While the elements of bread and wine remain the same substance, Christ’s body and blood are present “in, with and through” the bread and wine. This is referred to as consubstantiation.

Some faith traditions such as Reformed and Presbyterian who follow the teachings of John Calvin believe that Christ is not literally present in the elements of bread and wine, but that he is spiritually present. They believe that those who receive the elements of bread and wine in faith can actually receive Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many other faith traditions refer to the Eucharist as the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion which does not recognize any form of physical or spiritual presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Rather, the Lord's supper is a symbolic remembrance of Christ's suffering and a reminder of his power to overcome sin and death. For some it is an action of table fellowship.

We are uniquely blest in the Catholic Church to receive not merely symbols, but the most amazing gift each and every Eucharist, the very body and blood of Jesus, the Real Presence of Christ himself. May the Eucharist draw us more closely to Jesus himself and that "filled with his Holy Spirit, we may become one body, one spirit in Christ." Eucharistic Prayer III

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Week 5- February 11 & 12, 2017

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What is Christian unity? One of the profound affirmations shared by many of those who participated in the dialogue sessions between St. John Lutheran and Immaculate Conception last November is that there was a deep respect and reverence for one another's faith traditions. It was not a time to dismiss the beliefs and practices of the other as somehow wrong or less, but to lift up our similarities, respect our differences and affirm our common journey toward the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper "that they all may be one." (cf. John 17:21)

The big word for seeking Christian unity is ecumenism. Ecumenism, meaning "the whole inhabited world," is the promotion of cooperation and unity among Christians. The Ecumenical movement today has been brought about by the conviction that a divided Christianity is a scandal to the world. Underlying the Catholic Church's pursuit of ecumenism is its recognition that holiness and truth are also found in other churches (Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 8).

Dialogue is the way to Christian unity. Such dialogue is not only among the leaders of religions such as when Pope Francis prayed with the bishops of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund, Sweden last October, but also among people in everyday life. Dialogue of social action occurs when people of different religions work together toward greater social justice and unity, where the needs of all are met. IC parishioners working with St. John's Builder's on homes for the poor or numerous churches coming together to support the CALL Café and the CALL food pantry are a couple examples of dialogue through social action. Ecumenical dialogue occurs when we pray together such as the Prayer Service for Christian Unity that was held at IC in January. And ecumenical dialogue happens in everyday life, when we encounter one another in the grocery store, at sporting events and other community gatherings that are shared by people of all different faith traditions. What we often find in those every day encounters is that there is usually more that unites us than divides us.

Ecumenism is never to be confused with proselytism. Proselytize means to convert or attempt to convert someone from one religion, belief, or opinion to another. True Christian unity seeks to respect and reverence one another's faith traditions, practices and beliefs. While there are people who convert to other faith traditions for very good reasons, the goal of ecumenism is to promote cooperation and unity among all Christians.

May all Christians find our unity and strength in Christ Jesus, and be drawn closer to him

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Week 6- February 18 & 19, 2017

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How do we share faith in the Catholic Church and what does that look like?

Whenever we receive an amazing gift in our lives it is hard to keep it quiet. As children we can't wait to try it out and show it to our friends. As adults there is a deep sense of gratitude and joy when we receive something special. We not only want to express our sincere thanks, we also want to share the blessings of that gift with others.

Our Catholic faith is one of the most amazing and special gifts we receive in our lives. It touches and shapes every fabric of who we are, how we think, how we live and how we love. It is a truly awesome gift that literally spans every moment of our lives and prepares us for the gift of eternal salvation. It is a gift that impels us to give thanks and to share it with others. How we share the Good News of Jesus Christ is called Evangelization.

We share the Good News of our Catholic faith by the way we talk, by the way we interact with family and friends and by the way we live and love, worship and work, pray and play every day of our lives. Many of us just know when we are in the presence of a faith filled person, one who is deeply connected to the Lord Jesus. They are the ones who are passionate about what they believe and committed to sharing that with others. They are ones impelled to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

While evangelization has been around for a long time, Saint Pope John Paul II introduced us to the "new Evangelization." "According to the pope, "The expression New Evangelization was popularized in the encyclical of Pope Paul VI Evangelization in the Modern World, as a response to the new challenges-that the contemporary world creates for the mission of the Church."

"The new evangelization like all evangelization must be founded on the person of Jesus Christ and His gospel. Missionary evangelization is the responsibility and calling of all Christians. JP II named three types of evangelization - The first is bringing the gospel to peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known. Second, there are healthy mature Christian communities that are fervent in their faith, have a sense of the universal mission, and in which the Church carries out her activities and pastoral care. Here he seems to describe a situation that requires pastoral care and not evangelization. Third, there is what the pope calls an intermediate situation. Within

countries there are entire groups of the baptized who have lost a living sense of the faith, or no longer consider themselves members of the Church. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization." In this third situation people need to be socialized into situations of vibrant faith. Some need their faith to be renewed and enlivened. Others have had little or no training in the Christian faith and essentially need to be evangelized with the basic gospel and receive formation in the faith (catechesis). The basis of sharing the life of Christ with others is life in Christ. We are called to know Christ and to make Him known." Copyright (c) Dave Nodar - www.christlife.org

Sometimes even the most treasured gifts of our lives get set aside, lost or even broken. Once found again, they are a cause for great joy and renewed energy. Join us for *Contagiously Catholic: Practical Ways to Share your Faith* with Sean Ater on Wednesday, February 22, 2017 at 7 PM in the Parish Activity Center. May this be a wonderful opportunity for all of us to be reminded of the great gift we have in Christ Jesus and how we are called to share that gift with others.