

The Faith of the Catholic Church

An RCIA course by Fr Guy de Gaynesford

This presentation makes no claim to be an exhaustive expression of Catholic belief – for that you will need to immerse yourself in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. There is much that is not covered in these sessions: the fact that they are not included here does not mean they are unimportant, but points to the fact that these pages serve only as an introduction to the Catholic faith. I offer these pages in the hope that they may help you with some of the key aspects of our Catholic faith.

The Course of instruction and growing in faith is in four parts – the four great and ancient elements of the faith:

1. **The Creed** (*what* we believe) – in this section we look at the central teachings of the faith as handed down to us from the apostles. These are summarised for us in the *Creeeds*. This section deals with *faith*: what it means to believe, what specifically do we believe and how does believing change our lives.
2. **The Sacraments** (how we *receive and become* what we believe) – this section deals with how the Church, gathered together, celebrates the faith she holds – and this is done most fully in the seven sacraments. These are life-changing actions by which God gives us his life and we are made new.
3. **The Commandments** (how we *live* as a consequence of what we have become) – becoming the children of God, sharing his life and divine nature means a change in the way we live. We are now members of the household of God through the sacraments, and this change in who we are calls us to live as the people we have become. This way of life is revealed to us through the foundation of the 10 Commandments.
4. **The Our Father** (how we *pray* as a result of what we have become) – the change that God has wrought in us through the sacraments is shown most clearly in the way we relate to God: we are no longer rebels at war with God but his children (still prodigal) but now able to relate to God as children to their father, not as slaves to their owner. This relationship is underpinned by the spiritual life – the life of prayer. The most complete summary of all forms of Christian prayer is the prayer given us by Christ – the Our Father.

Specifically, then, the sessions will be looking at these four areas, opening up the extraordinary treasures of the Church and making available to us the wisdom and insight of thousands of the holiest men and women our race has known.

Section 1 – what we believe (The Creed)

1. The Most Holy Trinity

A look through Old and New Testaments at the origins of the Church's teaching on the One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. The Bible (2 sessions)

What the Church believes she is reading in the Scriptures, and how the Scriptures need to exist side by side with the Church's teaching office (the bishops in union with the Holy Father)

3. Jesus Christ – God becomes man

A look at who is Jesus Christ and what the Church proclaims he has achieved for us

4. The Church – Mystical Body of Jesus Christ

A consideration of the Church as the visible presence of Christ, through which he continues his ministry in our age

5. What is in a Catholic Church?

What we find in a Catholic Church building, why these things are present and their Jewish origins

6. The Church – God's people

The people who make up the Church – the living (the Church Militant), the holy souls in purgatory (the Church Suffering), and the saints in Heaven (the Church Triumphant)

7. Peter and the Church

A look at the ministry of the Pope and the teaching office of the bishops in union with the Pope

8. The Blessed Virgin Mary

What the Catholic Church teaches about the Mother of Christ and her place in Catholic devotion relative to Christ and to the saints

Section 2: How we worship (the 7 Sacraments)

9. God's Continued Presence: the sacramental economy

A look at how God has taught and led the human race through the work of the Son, and how the Son continues to be present in the ministry of the Church

10. Sacraments: what are they?

How the 7 liturgical sacraments of the Church are the God-made ways that Christ continues to lead, feed and heal his people through the centuries

11. The 3 Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism

A look at how the sacrament of Baptism regenerates the believer, making us God's adoptive children, filled with the Holy Spirit and heirs to eternal life

12. The 3 Sacraments of Initiation: Confirmation

A look at the sacrament that strengthens baptismal faith, preparing the disciple for adult witness to the Gospel

13. The 3 Sacraments of Initiation: the Sacrifice of the Mass

The Mass as our way of offering to the Father the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – a sacrifice of thanksgiving and salvation

14. The Rite of Mass

A look at the structure of the Mass so as to understand better what is there and why it is there

15. The 2 Sacraments of Vocation: Matrimony

The calling to image in a human way how God loves his creation, and specifically his Church

16. The 2 Sacraments of Vocation: Holy Orders

A look at how Jesus Christ is visibly present in the Church as High Priest and as servant

17. The 2 Sacraments of Healing: Anointing of the Sick

A look at how Jesus Christ is visibly and powerfully present in the Church as healer and physician of the soul

18. The 2 Sacraments of Healing: Confession

A look at how Jesus Christ is visibly and powerfully present in the Church for the forgiveness of our particular sins

19. The Ceremonies of Lent

A brief look at the specific ceremonies that take place in Lent, especially those involving adults preparing for baptism

20. The Liturgy of Holy Week

The apex and climax of the Church's year – a single liturgical act of worship spread over three days in three major ceremonies which come to their high point in the Easter Vigil at which candidates are baptised (or received into the Church if they have already been baptised), confirmed and receive Holy Communion

Section 3 – how we live (the 10 Commandments)

21. The Law of Love – the 10 Commandments in the Spirit of the Beatitudes

How the 10 commandments forms the basis of the way the Christian is called to live

22. Conscience and the Moral Law

What conscience is, what it most certainly is not, and how it guides the path of the Christian

23. The Ministry of Every Christian

Living within the Church and what this calls us to do

Section 4 – how we pray (the Our Father)

24. Christian Prayer: raising the heart and mind to God

A look at the nature of Christian prayer, what it is as well as what is certainly is not

25. The Our Father – summary of the whole Gospel

A close look at what is contained in the 7 petitions of the Our Father, and what this tells us about the prayer of the Christian

26. The Coming of the Kingdom – heaven, our home

What theologians call eschatology – a look at the last things, especially the call to live with God for ever in heaven

An important note

I have done my best to present these key elements of the Catholic faith as truly as possible, faithful to the formal teaching of the Catholic Church. However, I am very aware that this remains my own attempt to explain the faith – and that I may have done so clumsily, incompletely or misleadingly. While I have made every conscious effort to hand on the Catholic faith to you without prejudice or error, these pages have not received any official seal of approval. I therefore urge you, when reading these pages, to keep your copy of the Catechism open at all times – for if there is any divergence of teaching between the Catechism and anything I have written, then I must stress that you should always be guided by the Catechism. Any errors in the transmission of the faith will have been made by me: the Catechism, on the other hand, is a sure reference point for the teaching of the Catholic Church and should be preferred at all times.

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