



# **Programme of Preparation for Christian Initiation for Adults**

*Course Booklet*

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
Unit 1: Introduction to RCIA .....	4
Unit 2: What is the Purpose of Life?.....	8
Unit 3: Who or What is God? .....	13
Unit 4: The God who Reveals Himself (1) .....	18
Unit 5: The God who Reveals Himself (2) .....	23
Unit 6: Jesus Christ (1): The Fulness of Revelation .....	29
Unit 7: Jesus Christ (2): The Paschal Mystery – The Work of Christ .....	36
Unit 8: The Church (1): Established by Christ to Continue His Work .....	43
Unit 9: The Church (2): The Sacraments – Christ’s Work Goes On .....	51
Unit 10: The Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation .....	59
Unit 11: The Eucharist (1): The Source and Summit of the Christian Life .....	71
Unit 12: The Eucharist (2): The Parts of the Mass and the Effects of the Eucharist .....	78
Unit 13: The Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Sick .....	88
Unit 14: The Sacraments of Mission: Marriage and Holy Orders .....	97
Unit 15: Catholic Social Teaching: Fundamentals of the Moral Life.....	106
Unit 16: Catholic Social Teaching: Core Principles.....	116
Unit 17: What Comes Next? .....	125
Unit 18: Mary and the Communion of Saints .....	131
Unit 19: The Necessity of Prayer .....	141
Unit 20: Overview of the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation for Adults .....	148
Appendix 1: Important Catholic Texts and Prayers .....	150
Glossary .....	164
Certain Names Included in the Text .....	162
Reading and Resources .....	165

Written by Fr Mark Paver, copyright © Fr Mark Paver 2022.  
Updated 2025.

This booklet was prepared with the assistance of the formation team of the Parish of Our Lady of Hope Salford during the time that Fr Mark Paver was assistant priest there as a resource to prepare candidates in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. For more information please contact [mark.paver@dioceseofsalford.org.uk](mailto:mark.paver@dioceseofsalford.org.uk).

## Cover Image:

Elizabeth Wang, T-00081-OL, ‘Christ is our bridge to heaven - the only Way across the gulf between earthly life and eternal glory’, copyright © Radiant Light 2006, [www.radiantlight.org.uk](http://www.radiantlight.org.uk)

## **Introduction**

This booklet is intended as a guide to help you as you prepare for Christian Initiation or entry into full communion with the Catholic Church. It is an accompaniment to the learning and discussions that will take place during sessions held in the parish and seeks to present the main learning points from each of the units. It is not a replacement for attending those sessions as most of the learning will come from discussion with other participants and with the course leaders. Where words have a technical meaning with which not all will be familiar definitions are included in a glossary towards the back of the booklet. These words are italicised and underlined when they first appear in the text. At the end of each unit is a short list of further reading and resources where sections of the Catechism, helpful videos and other key references will be identified. The full references will be given in the “Reading and Resources” section at the end of the booklet.

## Unit 1: Introduction to RCIA

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) is the technical name given to the process of becoming a Christian or entering into full communion with the Catholic Church from another Christian denomination. The origins of the Rite date back to ancient times. From Apostolic times it has been part of the Church's tradition to baptise adults after some form of instruction was given. Over time, three distinct periods emerged in the time of preparation which could be distinguished. These were the catechumenate, Lent and the period of mystagogy. These periods remain central to the modern form of RCIA. In addition a period before catechumenate is recognised as an equally important part of the process. These periods are separated by "Rites", or Liturgical actions, which mark the end of one period and the beginning of the next.

The initial period is known as the *Period of Inquiry*. At this time a person is curious about becoming a Christian (or a Catholic Christian) and wants to know more. The Church, at this time, offers instruction to help the individual as they explore what it is that they are seeking. This period ends with the *Rite of Acceptance Into the Order of Catechumens*.

The second period is known as the *Period of the Catechumenate* and is a time for study of the main principles of the faith. This period, like that of inquiry, has no set timescale and can last for a few months or several years. During this time those aspiring to become Christian are known as catechumens and those already Christian but aspiring to

enter into full communion with the Catholic Church are known as candidates. The period comes to an end with the *Rite of Election*, which, in the Diocese of Salford, is held at the Cathedral and presided over by the Bishop on the First Sunday of Lent. All catechumens and candidates from around the Diocese attend and are enrolled for reception of the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter.

The third period is known as the *Period of Purification and Enlightenment*. It is a much shorter period and coincides with the time of Lent. This is a time of more intense preparation for the reception of the Sacraments. A time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving with the whole Church sharing the experiences of the catechumens and candidates. The end of this period is marked by the *Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation*. This celebration would normally take place at the Easter Vigil although it can happen at other times of the year if necessary.

A final period, which begins the life as a Christian, is called a *Period of Mystagogy* or post baptismal catechesis. This period extends throughout the Easter season and is a time for deepening the Christian experience and entering more fully into the life of the Church.

RCIA is part of the *Liturgy* of the Church, which makes it a public act of worship. It is based on a shared faith that comes to us as a community and that is passed on within the community. Those inquiring about the faith and later those who are catechumens and candidates make up a community within the larger community of the parish and



the Diocese. Thus, as much as God meets each of us intimately and individually, we journey towards Him together. In the favourite prayer of Bishop John: *Stay with us Lord on our journey.*

This booklet is supported by additional resources and references that are provided at the end of each unit, notably sections of the short book, *Credo*, and videos from the online programme, *Sycamore*. Full references for these resources are provided in the “Reading and Resources” section at the end of the booklet. Each unit will be discussed in a seminar style discussion session held weekly. The key learning from each unit should be read in advance and the additional resources indicated should also be read or viewed prior to the discussion seminar. The booklet and resources are not a replacement for attending the seminars since the main learning takes place within the presentation and discussion of the unit.

Where words have a technical meaning with which not all will be familiar definitions are included in a glossary towards the back of the booklet. These words are italicised and underlined when they first appear in the text.

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, including an introduction, can be found here: [https://  
www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/RCIA.pdf](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/RCIA.pdf)

## **Unit 2: What is the Purpose of Life?**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

John 1:35-39

*The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.*

John 17:3

*Father...this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

### **Key Learning:**

For the vast majority of people wondering about the purpose or meaning of life is not something that comes up too often. The reality is that we are so busy in the nitty gritty of life, the daily grind, the necessity of putting food on the table, of looking after ourselves and those who depend on us, that we don’t have time or energy left to wonder about such big questions. But every once in a while, for everyone, the question of meaning or purpose re-



emerges. It might pop up again in a time of crisis: at the loss of a loved one, a serious illness, a family breakdown. Or it might present itself at times of great joy: finding a deep and true love, or the birth of a child. Of course, very often, those demands of life quickly take our attention away again. But the questions never go away completely and recur when our defences are down. In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Pope Saint John Paul II described man's search for meaning like this:

“...a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life? These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives.” (*Fides et Ratio*, 1)

It is part of the nature of religion to claim to have an answer to the question of “why?” and, even more, to claim

to be able to guide people towards the fulfilment of life's meaning.

As we begin this course together it is good to keep this question in mind and to realise the truth of what Pope Saint John Paul II says, that how we respond to it decides the direction that our life will take. This is the reason we are gathered here together beginning this course because God has prompted us to search for meaning in our lives. How we respond to what we will learn about over the next few weeks and months will determine what the rest of our lives will look like and, in some cases, what the lives of our children and grandchildren will look like as well.

The Catholic Church, in common with other religions, believes it holds the answer to these fundamental questions of life: that man is created by God and called to seek Him, know Him and love Him with all his strength. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) puts it, “In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life.” (CCC, 1).

At the very heart of his being, man has a “God shaped hole”, understood by the Church to be a “capacity for God” (cf. CCC 27) as one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council explains,

“The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he

comes into being. For if man exists, it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator.” (*Gaudium et Spes* (GS), 19)

St Augustine, one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the Church, puts it all more simply in a prayer to God, “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 5-10

CCC, Prologue, 27-30

YOUCAT, Part 1

*Gaudium et Spes*, 1-22

Sycamore Film 1: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-1-the-search-for-happiness/>

# Notes and Questions

## Unit 3: Who or What is God?

### Scriptural Reflection:

Job 38:1-11

*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:  
“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?  
Gird up your loins like a man,  
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.  
“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding,  
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!  
Or who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its bases sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone  
when the morning stars sang together  
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?  
“Or who shut in the sea with doors  
when it burst out from the womb?—  
when I made the clouds its garment,  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
and prescribed bounds for it,  
and set bars and doors,  
and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,  
and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?”*

## Key Learning:

Hidden amongst the big questions of life that we looked at in the last unit is the question of God. Is there a God? If so who or what is He or She or It and does this Being have any remote interest in me or not? There are three principal responses to this question. First is what is called a theistic approach. A theist believes in the existence of God. Within theism though there are polytheists, who believe in the existence of multiple gods, and monotheists, who believe in the existence of a single God. Three of the world's most significant and largest religions are monotheistic: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

A second approach to belief in God is agnosticism. An agnostic, strictly speaking, believes that the existence or non-existence of God is not known or knowable. This is a more positive statement than simply saying "I don't know". Many people hold the latter view because they have not given the matter much thought. It might be argued that this position is not sustainable in the long term although lots of people live with this approach to life, seemingly happy to be unconvinced either way.

A third approach is atheism. An atheist believes that there is no God. It is important to recognise that atheism is as much a system of belief as theism. Based on the evidence available, an atheist has chosen to not believe in any kind of God.



Within each of these categories are a whole range of people whose beliefs have been formed from different sources. Some have taken things very seriously through research, thought and reflection to reach a position. Others have not thought much about it at all and yet profess to hold one belief or another.

Christianity is a monotheistic religion. That is to say that Christians believe in one God who created all things, including each one of us. Christians believe that a certain knowledge of God based on the natural world is possible and that evidence of His existence can be drawn from the world around us. Christian philosophers such as St Thomas Aquinas, St Augustine and St Anselm, as well as others in more recent times, have developed arguments for the existence of God based on the natural world. In this way they built on the thinking of Greek pagan philosophy, which had already speculated on the fundamentals of the natural world before Christianity.

In our modern times, the prevalent world view is heavily influenced by science and “knowledge” is often reduced to what can be proven empirically. Christians embrace all that science can tell us but at the same time hold that there are categories of knowledge that science is not able to prove and therefore sit outside of its realm of authority. Amongst these categories of “knowledge” is the knowledge of God’s existence. The kind of knowledge that leads to faith in God is of a different order from the kind of knowledge that leads us to understand that water boils at 100 degrees centigrade.

While God's existence cannot be proven scientifically, sufficient evidence can be gathered to create a convincing case and lead any individual to a position of belief. In other words, belief in God is not irrational, it follows rationally from the lived experience and observations we make. It does depend on two important factors however: first, the experience we have of God – that is to say the image we have of God, how we understand Him, how He has been presented to us by others, what we have received in our homes, our families and the world around us. The cumulative effects of all of this experience will shape our receptivity to the proposal that there is a benevolent God who created all things. The second important factor is how we choose to respond. We have a choice to make based on the evidence that is before us. Given the nature of faith and the type of evidence that can be gathered to support or deny it, the choice that is before a believer is also before a non-believer. There is no escaping this choice if we are to accept our reality.

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 5-10

CCC, 31-49

YOUCAT, Part 1

*Introduction to Christianity*, pp. 39-81

*Sycamore* Film 2: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-2-the-existence-of-god/>

*Sycamore* Film 7: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-7-the-gift-of-faith/>

# Notes and Questions

## Unit 4: The God Who Reveals Himself (Part 1)

### Scriptural Reflection:

Exodus 3:13-15:

*But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’” God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:*

*This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.*

### Key Learning:

As we discussed in the previous unit, we can “build a case” for the existence of God based on our life and experience which can be weighed up and examined alongside a case for the non-existence of God. This is all based on what is called “natural revelation”. There are two primary sources of natural revelation: the world around us and ourselves. When we look at the world around us we notice, for example, that there is movement, there is cause and effect, there is contingency, there is order and beauty. Christian speculation has reasoned that if there is movement there must be a First Mover, if there is cause and effect there must be a First Cause, if there is contingency there must be at least one thing that is not contingent, if there is order there

must be an intelligent designer and if there is beauty there must be one thing that is the most beautiful. Each of these ways of reasoning leads us to something that we call God. God is the First Mover, the Primary Cause, the only Necessary Being, the Intelligent Designer and the most beautiful or perfect of all other beings. This is some way from the old man on the cloud image that many of us were given of God in primary school!

And man can also discover aspects of God by looking closer to home, within himself. If there is any sense of moral right and wrong then this points to an objective truth which must have a source. If there is a longing for happiness, there must be something that will fulfil that longing. If there is an experience of the imperfect, there must surely be something perfect to be striven for.

Nevertheless, looking outside at the world around us or within us only gets us so far in our understanding of God. Christianity, building on its roots in Judaism, holds that God reveals Himself to us and gives us what we need to respond to His revelation and enter into a personal relationship with Him. This is called Divine Revelation and takes us beyond what we can achieve on our own in terms of our knowledge of God. The path of Divine Revelation in history is laid out as a story which we know as Salvation History. God reveals Himself in stages. First in creation and then, importantly, in relationship by choosing a people to call His own. From this people, the people of Israel, whose history forms a central part of the Christian story and is marked by dialogue and

encounter with God, emerges the One who is the culmination of God's Revelation, Jesus Christ, His Son.

What has been revealed by God is passed on through the generations in the context of a community. Beginning with Abraham God chose to reveal Himself to a people and by Abraham promised that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (cf. Genesis 12:1,3). The people of Israel gathered around Moses on Mount Sinai and received the Torah, the teaching that would govern the way they lived their lives (cf Exodus 19ff). For Christians the transmission of Divine Revelation has at its heart the community that Jesus gathered around Himself, particularly the twelve Apostles. The Apostles, who lived with Jesus, listened to His teaching and witnessed the key moments of His life as well as His death and Resurrection, were entrusted to preach the Gospel and "make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28:19).

The Apostles passed on what they had received from Jesus in two ways: orally and in writing. That which was written down is what we know as Sacred Scripture. That which was passed on orally formed a living Tradition that is preserved in the teachings of the Church through apostolic succession. The teaching office of the Church is referred to as the Magisterium and it has the task of "giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition" (Dei Verbum (DV), 10). When interpreting the Word of God, the Magisterium must have regard for three factors in particular: the unity of the



whole of Scripture, the living Tradition of the whole Church and the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. In respect of the latter, an important guide is the content of the Christian Creeds, particularly the ancient Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 15-17, 38-42

CCC, 31-38, 51-67, 74-133

YOUCAT, Part 1

*Dei Verbum*, 1-13

*Sycamore* Film 3: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-3-a-god-who-speaks/>

*Sycamore* Film 6: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-6-the-bible/>

“Three Minute Bible” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFJFwuNTPNo>

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron – Episode 3: “The Ineffable Mystery of God”

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 5: The God Who Reveals Himself (part 2)**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

Genesis 2:15-17

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”*

### **Key Learning:**

In the previous unit we considered the complementary roles of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, served by the Magisterium, in preserving and passing on what God has divinely revealed. We also looked at how we can discern God’s action in history and so identify Salvation History: that is how God has acted in history to save us. At this point we need to slow down a little and look at exactly what it is we need to be saved from before looking in a little more detail at the unfolding of Salvation History.

The structure of the books of the Bible helps us to do this. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are a sort of pre-history of humanity. They tell the story of man in relationship with God using figurative language influenced by the cultures of the emerging people of Israel and those that surrounded them. Amongst these chapters we have some of the Bible’s most well known passages including the story of creation,

the story of Adam and Eve, the story of Noah and the flood and the story of the building of the Tower of Babel. Collectively they do not paint a very hopeful picture of humanity! The method of story telling, in particular the use of a narrator who seems to have inner knowledge of God's thoughts, draws us into the drama. At one point we can almost hear a Divine "sigh" as, we imagine, God contemplates what to do with the creation He has made:

"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart." (Genesis 6:5-6)

In those first 11 chapters of Genesis we find a story of a people who want to rebel. God gave them everything to enjoy but set a limit for them for their own well being which they should not transgress (Genesis 2:17). The limit was transgressed in rebellion after the deception of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and what follows is a sorry tale of fratricide (Genesis 4:8), revenge (4:23-24), perversion (6:1-4, 9:20-27) and pride (11: 4). At the same time there are signs of hope in God's continuing care for the people, despite their rebellion (Genesis 3:21, 8:21), the emergence of righteous individuals such as Enoch and Noah who walked with God (5:22) and found favour in his eyes (6:8), and the establishment of an initial covenant between God and Noah and his descendants signed by a bow in the clouds (9:1-17).

Taken together these 11 chapters help us to understand the nature of our relationship with God and the state from which we need to be saved. God created everything good including ourselves. Indeed mankind is the pinnacle of His creation, made in His image and likeness (1:26). Man, along with all of creation, is made as an expression of God's love and God likes what He sees, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." (1:31). God gives us everything to enjoy but, knowing us better than we know ourselves, He invites us to exist within certain limits, to respect that He is God and we are His creation (represented in the garden by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). The temptation for us is not to trust God and, instead, to try to forge a life for ourselves without Him – one where we assure ourselves of what is good. In short to rebel against Him. This creates a world where instead of all living as children of God, confident in our knowledge of God's love for us and for everybody else, we live in a world where we must be the first to grab at the scarce resources that exist so as not to miss out. We must preserve ourselves, if necessary at the expense of the well being of others. God's care for us is forgotten in the frenzy to look after ourselves. We don't have to look too hard at the history books and even in our own times to see how accurate a description of human behaviour this is.

The incident described in the Garden of Eden, where Eve is tempted by the serpent to take the fruit of the tree, is known as the fall because it is the moment when mankind fell from the intimate relationship with God into which He

had been created. ***Salvation History is the story of putting this relationship back together.***

As we have said the stories in the first 11 chapters of Genesis use figurative language and should not be understood as historical accounts in the way that we understand history today. Nevertheless, the incident in the garden just described represents the first time that a human rebelled against God in this way: not trusting Him but taking his well being into His own hands. This first sin against God gives rise to the state of Original Sin which is passed on through the human race to subsequent generations and is overcome at Baptism as will be discussed later in the course.

As we emerge from the first 11 chapters of Genesis we enter into a different era and we see God's work to restore humanity in right relationship with Him begin to unfold in human history. Significantly, God enters a series of covenants with Abraham, Moses and King David and later spoke through His prophets. The Bible tells the story of the people in their relationship with God. It is a turbulent story of highs and lows, joys and sorrows. As the centuries pass by in the story of the people of Israel, the contours that trace the story begin to take a familiar shape. The people rebel and drift away from God and his ways, often led by an unscrupulous leader, they find themselves in trouble (often in some form of servitude or slavery) and in need of help, God finds a way to reach out to them and bring them back to Him. After a time of peace, the rebellion begins again. And so it goes on. For us readers of the Bible today it is like



looking into a deep reflecting pool in which an honest look reveals ourselves, our own world, our own communities and families and our own inner lives. In the Christian understanding, all that happens to the people of Israel as described in the *Old Testament* prepared them to welcome into the world His only Son, the Word of God who became flesh (cf. John 1:14), Jesus Christ.

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 11-13, 38-42

CCC, 279-314, 355-412

YOUCAT, Part 1

Genesis 1-3

Colossians 1:12-20

*Sycamore* Film 12: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-12-creation-fall-salvation/>

**Notes and Questions:**

## Unit 6: Jesus Christ (1): The Fullness of Revelation

### Scriptural Reflection:

John 1:1-14

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

## Key Learning:

As we discussed in the last unit, the history of the people of Israel in their relationship with God is recounted in what Christians call the “Old Testament”. The Old Testament ends, seemingly, without a conclusion. The people, who have endured wars, conflict and even exile, find themselves oppressed again by foreign powers in the centuries leading up to the birth of Jesus. What has happened to God’s promise? to His faithfulness?

A Christian reading of the Old Testament recognises that the people were being prepared always for the fulfilment of God’s promises. God chooses Abraham to be a father of a great nation and promises that through him all the families of the earth shall be blessed (cf. Genesis 12:1-3). He reveals himself to Moses, entered into a personal dialogue with him, giving himself a name and, through Moses, gave the people access to His will expressed in the Torah. Later, after the people had asked for a king and King David committed to build God a house, God made a further promise to King David, that He would establish His own house through David’s descendants (cf. 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 89). In the prophets, two lines of expectation emerged that pointed to the reality that God was continuing to prepare the people for salvation: the coming of a Messiah and the coming of a new Spirit. The former is especially prominent in the prophet Isaiah (cf. for example Isaiah 6:12, 11:1-2, 42:1-9, 49:1-6, 50:4-10 and 52:13-53:12) and the latter is expressed most clearly in Ezekiel and Jeremiah (cf. Ezekiel 36:25-28, Jeremiah 31:31-34).

As Christian bibles are laid out, the Old Testament ends with the book of the prophet Malachi which contains the promise of something new, that a messenger will be sent to prepare the way of the Lord (cf. Malachi 3:1).

Building on this promise, St Mark's Gospel begins as follows:

*“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”*

(Mark 1:2-3)

The figure of the voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord is subsequently revealed to be John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus, whose appearance heralds the beginning of the New Testament and the coming of a Messiah who would save the people.

For a Christian, the New Testament continues the Old and brings it to a fulfilment. It begins with the Gospel, a word which means “Good News”.

St John's version of the Gospel begins in a different way from the others and makes it clear that the Messiah is more than merely a very special man, a great warrior or a king—leader in the model of King David. Jesus, the Messiah, is the Eternal Word Himself. The logos, or order, that

underpins all of creation and was “with God” in the beginning. Now, as St John teaches us “the Word became flesh and lived amongst us” (John 1:14). This is the essence of the Good News: God has not deserted us, He does not leave us alone despite our unfaithfulness to Him. He constantly reaches out to us to bring us back to Him. He is faithful even if we are not and He has even found a way to enter into our very world in human form.

*Dei Verbum* (DV), the teaching document of the Second Vatican Council that addresses Divine Revelation, indicates that Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the fulness of that Revelation teaching,

“after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, “now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1-2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as “a man to men.” He “speaks the words of God” (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; John 17:4). (DV 4)

St Paul puts it much more simply saying, “in him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

The CCC offers four explanations as to why it was necessary for the Word to become flesh. First, the Word became flesh in order to save us by reconciling us with God



(CCC 457). This was the response to the sinful rejection of God's love for us represented by the story of Adam and Eve and lived out in the lives of all of their descendants. Second, the Word became flesh so that we might know God's love (CCC 458). In giving His Son His love for us is made clear. Third the Word became flesh to be our model of holiness (CCC 459). By the example of His life and teachings we are shown the way to live. Finally, the Word became flesh to make us "partakers of the Divine nature" (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) (CCC 460). This is the end goal of our lives, to share in the life of God and so God, becoming man, makes this possible.

What makes Christianity unique amongst the other Abrahamic monotheistic religions is the claim being made here that Jesus is God. Not just that he is like God, that he has something special to say or that he sets us a good example to follow but that he is God. This is a stunning claim and if you are stunned as you hear it you are not alone. It stunned Jesus' contemporaries, it stunned many in the centuries after him and it continues to stun people today. It can be a stumbling block for people. But the Christian claim remains. The Good News is that God truly is with us always (Matthew 28:20) and manifestly so since He came to us in the flesh.

The reality of the Divinity of Christ is something that, while divinely revealed (and present in both Scripture and Tradition), was recognised by the Church only gradually in the centuries after Jesus and eventually led to the development of the Dogma of the Trinity, the understanding

that God revealed Himself to be of one Substance in three “persons”. The Church reached its settled view on the co-Divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit after centuries of prayer and reflection, philosophical debate and finally a series of *Ecumenical Councils* culminating in those of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). Later, the Church expressed the Christological dogma on the twofold nature of Christ (that Jesus is both wholly God and wholly man) following further reflection and the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 19-26, 31-34

CCC, 422-682

YOUCAT, Part 1

*Sycamore* Film 11: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-11-the-light-of-christ/>

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 1 “Amazed and Afraid: The Revelation of God Become Man”

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 7: Jesus Christ (2): The Paschal Mystery – The Work of Christ**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

Matthew 1:18-25

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

*“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”  
which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.*

### **Key Learning:**

In the previous unit we considered how Salvation History sets off on a new course with the coming into the world of Jesus Christ who was revealed to be Son of God, the Word made flesh. The opening chapter of the Gospel of Matthew

teaches us that Jesus fulfils what is promised in the prophet Isaiah, “that the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall name him Emmanuel”, meaning God with us (cf. Isaiah 7:14). We are told in the same chapter of Matthew’s Gospel that the child that Mary would give birth to should be called Jesus, “for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21). It helps us to know at this point that the name “Jesus” is a rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua, a name which means “God saves”. Thus Jesus’ very name contains his mission. The facts that he is Emmanuel (God with us) and that his mission is to save his people from their sins are not unrelated since the very essence of sin is to be separated from God. Jesus comes to ensure that all men and women always have access to God and in this way save us from our sins.

St John, in his Gospel, expresses this more directly,

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

The primary “work” of Christ then is to “save us”, to reconcile us to God (2 Corinthians 5:19) and he achieved this by what is known as the Paschal Mystery which is the technical name for the life, passion (suffering), death, resurrection and ascension into heaven of Christ.

Of course, in a few paragraphs we cannot exhaust all there is to say and reflect on in the figure of Jesus. That is a task for the whole of our lives. For now we must be content with covering a few of the central ideas at least in outline.

In terms of Jesus' life and teachings we can begin with an important question which was put to him by a lawyer, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36 (see also Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-28)). Jesus responds as follows:

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and the first commandment. And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 22:37-40).

This synthesis of what had been revealed to the people of Israel through the law and the prophets remains the central message of the Christian faith: to love and praise God is our first duty and, motivated by love of God, to love our neighbour. Love for our neighbour is made personal to Jesus at the end of the Gospel of Matthew in the famous account of the Last Judgment when we are told, "whatever you did to the least of my brethren you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40).

Much of Jesus' life reported to us in the Gospels is spent revealing his nature as Divine and drawing people who might otherwise have been cast off into a relationship with God. Such people include the "lost sheep of the house of

Israel” (Matthew 15:24), tax collectors (cf Luke 19:1-10, Mark 2:13-14)), sinners (John 8:1-11, Luke 15:1), lepers (Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 17:11-19) and despised foreigners (John 4:1-42). But Jesus predicts that it is when he will die that his work of bringing people back to God will be accomplished, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:32).

In order to understand Jesus’ death as a saving act we have to acknowledge two things. First that in some way it was necessary to atone for the sinfulness of humanity. To see this is to recognise that something had to be done to put back in order what had become disordered. There had to be an act to rebalance things. This should not be misunderstood (as it has been at times in history) as if there was a vengeful God who needed to be satisfied by the blood of His Son. This image of God does not fit with Divine Revelation as a whole. A better understanding is to see that it is not God that needed to be satisfied but us who need to know that God has put things right on our behalf. While the language of sacrificial offerings may seem strange to us today it would not have been for the people of Jesus’ time, especially for the Jewish people for whom offering sacrifices in the Temple was a regular part of cultic life.

Secondly we have to know that the work of Jesus was done voluntarily by him to fulfil the will of the Father. Jesus “laid down his life” (cf. John 10:11, 17) as an act of love to reconcile man and God. In this way he would glorify God (cf. John 12:27-28) and show to his disciples the way to



follow him (cf. John 13:1-20; 34-35), that is to “love one another; even as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)

Therefore as much as we can see in Jesus’ life the fulfilment of the two “great” commandments to love God and our neighbour, so his death can also be understood both as an act of praise of God and the ultimate act of love of us (cf. John 13:1).

The Resurrection of Jesus vindicates the work of the Son and manifests the glory of God as it demonstrates mastery over death, the “last enemy” (1 Corinthians 15:26). His Ascension into heaven, the final stage of his work, allows for the sending of the Holy Spirit, the promised Advocate (John 16:7), who will give power to His disciples (Acts 1:7-9) and life to the Church.

The life of a Christian is lived with eyes firmly fixed on the Paschal Mystery. It is not some mythic tale for us to look at from afar. Rather it is a way of life which is imprinted within the personal story of each of our lives. Our participation in the life of Christ means our participation in the Paschal Mystery. This is an inescapable reality for all men, not only for Christians, as *Gaudium et Spes* teaches:

“Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope. All this holds true not only for

Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and Divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery. (GS, 22)

To be a follower of Christ is to be drawn into the Paschal Mystery. This means that the life of a Christian proceeds by the dual and inseparable command of loving God and neighbour, and, in the process, doing “battle against evil”, within and without, whatever the cost. Entry into this life is signalled by the act of the will and expression of faith that precedes Baptism and the required *grace* is made effective through that Sacrament as we will discuss when we look in more detail at the Sacraments.

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 27-29

CCC, 456-460, 512-679

YOUCAT, Part 1

*Gaudium et Spes*, 22

*Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, pp. 38-51

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 2 “Happy Are We: The Teachings of Jesus”

*Sycamore* Film 4: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-4-who-is-jesus/>

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 8: The Church (1): Established by Christ to Continue His Work**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

Matthew 16:13-20

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 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.” Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

### **Key Learning:**

We have come across several of the documents that were produced at the Second Vatican Council already. The one that was prepared to teach about the Church is called Lumen Gentium, meaning “Light of the Nations”. In the first paragraph of that document a very short definition of the Church is offered as follows:

“the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG1)

It's a bit of a mouthful but it fits very well with what we looked at in the previous unit on the mission of Christ. As we saw, the primary work of Christ was to “save us from our sins” which can be understood as reconciling us with God, putting things right with Him once and for all, achieving unity with Him. As we said this was achieved by his life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven – his Paschal Mystery. Thus the description of the Church offered by *Lumen Gentium* above should make sense to us. The Church, the people that Jesus formed around him, becomes a “sacrament or sign” of this unity with God. It is also a people who set out to live by the dual command of love of God and neighbour and therefore is also a sign of the unity of the whole of the human race. This sign is visible for others to see and be drawn towards so that they too can enter into the relationship with God that He wills for all.

In short, the Church is given to us by Christ to carry on his work to reconcile all people to God. Thus we hear at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew, as Jesus gathers his disciples around him at the top of a mountain in Galilee, that he commissions them to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19).

The transmission of the task from Christ to the Apostles (and therefore to the Church) is made more explicit still in the work of Luke-Acts<sup>1</sup>. There, before his ascension into heaven, Jesus promises that his apostles will receive power when the Holy Spirit will come upon them and they will be his witnesses “in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (cf. Acts 1:8). Further it is in Acts that we read of the events of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is described as coming down on the Apostles as tongues of fire (cf. Acts 2:1-4). For many, this is the moment that the Church is born since it is the Holy Spirit that animates and gives life to the Church (cf CCC 749). For others, an equally significant moment for the birth of the Church is found in the Gospel of John when blood and water flowed from the side of Jesus on the cross, the blood and the water representing the Sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism.

The 4th Century Nicene Creed that is recited still during Sunday Mass lists four characteristics of the Church: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

## ***One***

The Church is *one* by her very nature. The CCC explains that this is first because of her source and exemplar: the Trinity, a community of persons of one substance. Indeed the work of Christ, the Son, draws the Church into the Trinitarian life, a community of love. She is *one* also because of her founder, Christ, who draws all men to him (John

---

<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are a single work understood to be written by the same author, traditionally identified as St Luke.

12:32). She is *one* because of the Holy Spirit, her “Soul”, who cannot be divided although expressed in manifold gifts or charisms (cf CCC 813, 814). Her ***unity is visible*** especially in the profession of faith, the common acts of worship (especially the sacraments) and apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Sadly the reality of unity in the Church has been elusive throughout its history due to human frailty. There have been threats to unity since the very beginning, even before the Gospels were written down! (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13). But over the history of the Church there have been some particularly serious wounds to the unity of the Church notably the “Great Schism” which separated the *Eastern and Western Churches* and took place in 1054 and the Protestant Movement of the 16th Century which led to the creation of a number of distinct churches (Lutheranism from 1517, The Church of England from 1534, the Reformed Tradition from the 1520s and 30s). Later, from various branches of Protestantism, emerged other movements that we know today (such as Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism).

The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church established by Christ “subsists in” the Catholic Church (LG 8, cf. CCC 816) and also that “many elements of sanctification and of truth” are found outside of the visible Catholic Church (LG 8, cf. CCC 819). In other words Catholic teaching holds that the Holy Spirit is active outside of the visible Catholic Church, in other churches and ecclesial communities as well as in the wider world, leading



people to salvation since “all these blessings come from Christ and lead to him” (CCC 819). All Christians are compelled to work towards Christian unity since to live without it is to live contrary to the nature of the Church.

## ***Holy***

The Church is *holy* once again because of her source, the Trinity, her founder, Christ who is her head while she is his body (cf. Colossians 1:18), and the Holy Spirit, who gives her life. As St Paul teaches us in his letter to the Ephesians:

*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27).*

As the Church is the “holy people of God”, all of her members can be called “saints” yet she proposes as models of life those members whose lives displayed heroic virtue and lived according to God’s grace. These are the saints in the sense more commonly understood and their lives are a source of inspiration and renewal for the Church.

And yet we are all too familiar with the failings of the Church, the scandal caused by sin in her members. This is because, as *Lumen Gentium* teaches, just as Christ drew towards him tax collectors and sinners (cf Luke 15:1), so the Church is not a private members club for the holiest members of society. Far from it, she is open to all. As Jesus

himself taught, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17). The reality of our lives is this: while the Church is *holy* by its nature, “All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners.” (CCC 827).

## ***Catholic***

In the context of the Creed to say that the Church is catholic refers to its universality. As the CCC teaches, this is true in two senses. First of all it is true because of the presence of Christ in her. It was Christ’s desire that his work continue in her and he gave her the means to do this: in the “correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession.” (CCC 830).

In a second sense the Church is catholic because of her mission to the whole of the human race and all people are called to belong to the new People of God (CCC 831). Paragraphs 13 to 16 of *Lumen Gentium* explains with more precision how the Church hopes to bring to salvation her members and those closely associated with her and even hope for salvation for those still far away.

## ***Apostolic***

To say that the Church is apostolic, as the CCC teaches, is to emphasise three essential characteristics. First that she is built on the foundation of the Apostles (cf. Matthew

28:16-20). Second, guided by the Holy Spirit she passes on the *deposit of faith* given to the apostles and preserved in Scripture and Tradition. Finally, that she continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the successors of the apostles, the bishops who share the priestly office of Christ – prophet, priest, and king. The spiritual gift received by the apostles to continue the work of Christ is passed on in *episcopal ordination*, which bestows the fullness of the high priesthood. Thus all Bishops hold this gift in their particular churches where they are assisted by priests, deacons and lay people through delegation.

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 35-37

CCC, 683-962

YOUCAT, Part 1

*Sycamore* Film 5: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-5-the-holy-spirit-and-the-church/>

*Sycamore* Film 13: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-13-the-community-of-the-church/>

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 5 “The Indispensable Men: Peter, Paul and the Missionary Adventure”

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 6 “A Body Both Suffering and Glorious: The Mystical Union of Christ and the Church”

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 9: The Church (2): The Sacraments – Christ’s Work Goes On**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

### **Key Learning:**

Looking at the revelation of God and the work of Jesus in the earlier units we considered the reason that the Word became flesh. We saw, in paragraphs 457 to 460 of the CCC four reasons why the Word became flesh: to reconcile us with God, that we might know God’s love, as a model of holiness for us and so that we might be partakers in the Divine nature. We also looked at the Paschal Mystery, which we explained, is the technical name for the work of Christ by which our reconciliation to God is achieved. It is useful to review some of the key aspects of that work now:

1. By the birth of Christ the eternal Trinitarian God entered into our time and space and took on human nature. The “Word became flesh” (John 1:14);

2. By the death of Christ God himself establishes justice for all the wrongs done in the world for all time;
3. By the resurrection of Christ God is glorified and Christ vindicated and revealed as the “first born of the dead” (cf. Colossians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 15:20) giving us a promise to share in his resurrection;
4. By the ascension of Christ he prepares a place for us in the life of God, he is present for us always and sends the Holy Spirit to guide and lead us through his Church;

This is all very well and good but would have no effect for us if we no longer had access to the work of Christ, if somehow it remained out of our reach. Thus we explained, in the previous unit, that the Church was established by Christ and passed on to the Apostles in order to continue His work. Through the Holy Spirit the life and teachings of Christ are recalled and those elements necessary for salvation are retained in Scripture and Tradition. Preeminently this includes the dual command “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul”; and “you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22: 37, 39). The example of Christ’s life shows us that love has no limits, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13; cf. 13:1). All those open to understanding the meaning of the Paschal Mystery are drawn into it to follow his example.

But salvation is not about imitation for if it were it would be up to us to achieve it ourselves. Rather, it comes to us as a gift from God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit and the Church. There are always two “movements” in the life of

faith. The first always comes from God as He reveals His true nature to us, He “stands at the door and knocks” (cf. Revelation 3:20) and waits for our response. The second movement is precisely our response as we hear the knock and recognise the truth of our life and our future and are drawn deeper and deeper into God’s love for us so that it redounds in our own lives.

In order to understand how the Church allows us to access the saving work of Christ we need to look at what is meant by the term *Liturgy*. The CCC explains that the word “liturgy” originally meant a “public work” or a “service in the name of/on behalf of the people” (CCC 1069). Crucially, “***through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church***” (CCC 1069).

It is principally by means of the liturgy that, as *Lumen Gentium* 1 teaches, the Church is a sign of the unity between God and men, a sign, in other words, that we have been “saved” and that the effects of salvation are lived in the concrete reality of our lives by fellowship with others. This is because it is “through the liturgy especially that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (CCC 1068).

We might ask how it is possible for Christ to be present and to work in the liturgy. The CCC offers an explanation as follows:



“His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. the Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is - all that he did and suffered for all men - participates in the Divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection abides and draws everything toward life.” (CCC 1085)

The privileged means of communicating the work of salvation to us within the liturgy are the seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Reconciliation, the Sacrament of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Orders.

The CCC defines the Sacraments as follows:

“The Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which Divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament.” (CCC 1131)

This is a definition that has evolved from the reflection of the Church through the centuries. To begin with we must note that the sacraments are signs of something else – they point to a reality, much like a road sign that warns of a cliff edge points to the reality of the cliff edge.

St Thomas Aquinas, writing in the 13th Century, helps us to break this down a little. He used Latin expressions to distinguish between three concepts:

First is the sign itself (*sacramentum tantum*) – in the Eucharist this is the bread and wine and the words spoken, at Baptism it is the water and the words. Second is the “reality and the sign” (*res et sacramentum*) – this is the reality that the sign points towards (the cliff edge in the road sign example). In the Eucharist this would be the real presence of Christ, in Baptism it is what is known as the baptismal seal or character. Finally is the reality itself (*res tantum*), the final effect of the sacrament is a step into (in the case of Baptism) or a deepening of the life of grace. In Baptism this includes the forgiveness of sins and entry into the Body of Christ. In the Eucharist it is deeper union with Christ and with one another.

Thus the sacraments are not merely signs, they are signs and reality **together**. Whereas a road sign warning about a cliff edge can be moved and placed in a field where there is no cliff edge, sacraments cannot be separated from the reality that they signify.

Moreover, the definition in the CCC describes sacraments as “efficacious”. What does this mean? In short it means that they are effective, they work, they do what they are supposed to do. This is not the same thing as saying that they always produce great fruit in the recipient. When the Church teaches that the sacraments are efficacious she means that all the grace that Christ wishes to bestow

through them is made available to the recipient. This is because the sacraments are the work of Christ, not of the minister who mediates his work. When a priest is presiding in the liturgy of the Church, including the sacraments, he stands in the person of Christ and Christ works through him. It is because the liturgy, and the sacraments as part of it, is the work of Christ that the sacraments are guaranteed to be effective. This means that when someone receives any sacrament they can be sure that the grace signified by it has been made available to them. The grace, in other words, comes out of the work worked (*ex opere operato*) and not because of the merits of the minister. For this reason, even a “bad” minister can mediate sacramental grace as long as he has the intention to do so.

As noted though this is not the same as saying that the sacraments will automatically bear great fruit in the recipient or immediately be life changing. The recipient of the grace has to be appropriately disposed and any obstacles to grace have to be removed. The cause of the grace is Christ but the recipient plays their part in the reception of the grace. We can think of this like a pump blowing out air – the pump works, the air is good and will inflate the tyres but first the dust cap has to be removed!

So, perhaps we can conclude by saying, in summary, that Sacraments are signs of God’s love or grace, which, if the recipient is disposed to it, bring about in that individual the reality to which the sign points.

Is there any analogy that will help us better grasp these somewhat complicated ideas? Perhaps the analogy of human love works to some degree. Love is communicated between two people by signs: words, touch, embrace, gifts etc. These signs point to reality of the love that exists between the two people and in some sense make that love increase and take effect when understood as sincere. If we can grasp that the Paschal Mystery is ultimately a love story, God's expression of His love for us through His Son, the sacraments are the means by which He communicates that love to us. We know His communication is sincere because it is Christ doing his work using the means he instituted in his Church given his authority through the apostles.

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 46-49

CCC, 1066-1206

YOUCAT, Part 2, pp. 102-115

*The Sacramental Mystery*, pp. 1-28

<https://rcdow.org.uk/att/files/faith/catechesis/baptism/sacraments.pdf>

*Sycamore* Film 14a: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9atV0zoRTi0>

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 10: The Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

Mark 1:9-11

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.”*

### **Key Learning:**

As we now turn to look at the individual sacraments we will approach them in a certain order. We will begin by looking at the Sacraments of Initiation, that is Baptism and Confirmation (in this unit) and the Eucharist (in the next two units). After that we will look at the Sacraments of Healing – Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. Finally we will look at the Sacraments of Mission – Marriage and Holy Orders. In turn we will examine the New Testament background for the Sacrament, who may receive the Sacrament and why, and what the effects are. When we look at the Eucharist we will spend a little more time since it is the fount and apex (or source and summit) of the whole Christian life (LG 11; cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC)10).

## ***Baptism***

Although we tend to think about Baptism as something that happens usually to young children, it was just as common, if not more so, in the early church that adults would be Baptised. Naturally enough people would desire Baptism when they first heard the proclamation of the Gospel and this could come at any age. When whole households were baptised, it is believed that from the earliest times infants were baptised with everybody else.

### *Institution:*

While the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan by John (cf. Mark 1:9-11, Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22) is considered by some of the great thinkers and *fathers of the Church* (e.g. St Ambrose) as the moment that Baptism was instituted by Christ, others hold it to be the discussion that Jesus had with Nicodemus as described in chapter 3 of the Gospel of John. The attraction of the latter is that Jesus refers to the need to be reborn by water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Moreover, John the Baptist himself makes a distinction between the baptism that he provides and that which will be provided by the one who “is mightier” and who will baptise with “the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16). Perhaps the clearest moment of institution of the Sacrament occurs at the end of the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus commands his disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Every Baptism in every church represents an occasion when this command is carried out.



It is certainly true, and relevant for our understanding of our own Baptism, that Jesus' Baptism by John the Baptist was only a prefiguration, a sign, of his actual baptism which occurred at his passion, death and resurrection. A clue to this is found in the Gospel of Matthew when he responds to John's objection that Jesus should be baptising him by saying "let it be so **for now**" (Matthew 3:15). The symbolic nature of his own baptism becomes more clear during his discussion with James and John in chapter 10 of the Gospel of Mark. There he asks the two ambitious "sons of thunder", "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?" (Mark 10:38). Jesus' actual baptism was still to come and would come when, in complete trust to the Father's love for Him, he went to the cross to fulfil his will.

Thus our Baptism is not so much a sign of Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, although it bears similarities to that, rather, it is a sacrament of his passion, death and resurrection. It is this that we enter into and share with Jesus through Baptism.

### *Recipient:*

Baptism is the "basis of the whole christian life, the gateway to the life in the spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments" (CCC 1213). Without Baptism, none of the other sacraments can be administered validly.

Baptism requires faith. It does not have to be a perfect and mature faith but a basic faith that is called to develop (cf.

CCC 1253). Fundamentally Baptism is about turning to Christ, through the church and asking to be saved. For children, the faith of the parents, godparents and community at large stands in the place of the as yet undeveloped faith of the child. For all people, children and adults, faith must grow after Baptism (CCC 1254). Since Christ is the one who was sent to save us, the Church “does not know of any means other than Baptism” that saves (cf. CCC 1257). Baptism can only be administered once and anyone can be Baptised (CCC 1246).

### *Effects:*

The principal effects of Baptism are forgiveness from sins and a new birth in the Holy Spirit (cf. CCC 1262). In addition the new Christian is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and receives an indelible spiritual mark (character) which can never be erased.

Before moving on to look at Confirmation, it is worthwhile to look in a little more detail at the two principal effects of Baptism:

### *Forgiveness of Sins:*

Sin is a word that doesn't appear very often in everyday language. For some people the very word brings up bad memories when they may have received an unhealthy view of God as if He is waiting to punish us, so we have to constantly be doing things to please Him or saying sorry for

doing things wrong. Sadly this view was all too common at one time and its effects still linger.

While we might struggle to find meaning in the word “sin” we certainly recognise the phenomena of sins when we see or personally experience them!

Pope Francis is very aware of this and he tries to teach us exactly this point in his letter concerned with caring for our common home known as *Laudato Si'*. In that letter the Pope writes, “sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.” (*Laudato Si'*, 66).

A stage in maturing in the faith means to recognise that much of the brokenness that we see in the world around us – wars, exploitation, indifference to suffering, waste, corruption, abuse to the environment – can all be traced back to what the Church calls sin: greed, selfishness, deception, manipulation, anger, envy, lust and the rest. It is another stage on the road to growth in faith to recognise that each of these negative inclinations are present in each one of us and we need help to overcome those inclinations.

St Paul, one of the Church's greatest saints, knew this struggle and wrote about it in his letter to the Romans saying, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.” (Romans 7:15) Even though we know we should be generous and kind to others, we very often fall

foul of our innate instinct to look after number one! We are in good company with St Paul.

The Church makes a distinction here which is important too. We must be very clear that when we are speaking about infant Baptism we are not speaking about purification from ***personal sin***. Personal sins are forgiven at Baptism for an adult but not for children under the age of seven as no personal sins have been committed that need to be forgiven.

What is wiped away at Baptism of both adults and children is ***Original Sin***. This is different from personal sin. Original Sin is something that the Church teaches we are all born with: we have inherited it. In simple terms Original Sin is the reason that we all, including babies, have to turn to Christ to be saved.

Reflecting on what has been revealed to us in the Bible, the Church understands that human nature was permanently damaged by the rebellious action of our first parents. That action is described in the story of Adam and Eve in chapter 3 of the book of Genesis. This story, along with the other stories in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, should not be understood as giving historical accounts in the modern sense of the term. Rather, they are teaching us about ***who we are in relationship with God***.

The story of Adam and Eve teaches us first that God created us good but that the actions of our first parents distorted God's creation. At the heart of that action was a lack of trust in God, which led to a sense that man had to

look after himself. Man's instinct to look after himself at the expense of others and not to trust in God's love for Him is at the heart of ***all*** sin.

Human nature then, according to Church teaching, was created good by God and was subsequently damaged by man. The damage that was done came at the very beginning of the species and has been passed on ever since. Thus we all inherited a damaged nature which needs to be repaired.

At Baptism we turn to Christ and are claimed by Him. Personal sins for adults and the inheritance of Original Sin is wiped away so that, as the Catechism says, "In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God" (CCC1263).

### *New Birth in the Holy Spirit:*

But Baptism is not only about purification from sins, it is also about new life and the second principal effect of Baptism is new birth in the Holy Spirit. Baptism makes the newly Baptised a new creature. The Catechism uses some quite complicated language here including describing the newly Baptised as "an adopted child of God" who has become a "partaker of the Divine nature", "a member of Christ and co-heir with him" and a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1265). To grasp the full meaning of all of these expressions takes time, reflection and growth.

To put things more simply (hopefully) we can say that through the faith of the newly Baptised, or their parents on their behalf, the Sacrament of Baptism changes the very core of a person in such a way that they are disposed, and have all the gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary, to be in relationship with God now and forever.

The newly baptised receives sanctifying grace. This allows them to believe in God, to hope in Him and to love Him through the theological virtues. They can live and act under the promptings of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they can grow in goodness by developing a life of virtue (cf. CCC 1266). A person is permanently changed at Baptism with an indelible mark on the soul, a character which cannot be removed.

## ***Confirmation***

### *Institution:*

Evidence that the Sacrament of Confirmation was instituted by Christ is found above all in the post-resurrection scene at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles when Jesus addressed his disciples saying, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). This promise was realised at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Subsequently in Acts (e.g. Acts 8:14-17, 19:1-7) there is evidence of the apostles laying on hands in invocation of the Holy Spirit in a rite that is distinct from Baptism. It is



reasonable to assume that this practice developed directly from Christ's teachings.

Two traditions of administering the Sacrament have emerged in the Church. Originally Confirmation was included as part of the rite of Baptism and this is the tradition that has prevailed in the Eastern Church so that the priest confers Confirmation using the oil consecrated by the Bishop. In the West a custom developed whereby there would be two post baptismal anointings, one by the priest as part of the baptismal rite and a second by the Bishop. The first anointing remains as part of the baptismal rite and signifies the participation of the newly baptised in the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices of Christ. The second anointing, which is Confirmation, is performed separately and usually several years after Baptism (cf. CCC 1290 to 1292).

For this reason in the West Confirmation is sometimes called the "Sacrament of Christian Maturity" (cf. CCC 1308) but this should not be understood as implying that a threshold in maturity must be overcome in order to receive the Sacrament.

### *Recipient:*

Confirmation can and should be received by anyone who is Baptised and, indeed, the CCC teaches that "reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of Baptismal grace." (CCC 1285).



### *Effects:*

The effect of the Sacrament is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit which “increases and deepens baptismal grace” (cf. CCC 1303). As the Bishop (or priest) lays his hands over the candidates he prays for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as follows:

“Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who brought these your servants to new birth  
by water and the Holy Spirit,  
freeing them from sin:  
send upon them, O Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete;  
give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and fortitude,  
the spirit of knowledge and piety;  
fill them with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.”

Like Baptism, Confirmation leaves an indelible mark on the soul, a character, which signifies that Jesus Christ has marked the Christian with the seal of his Spirit (cf. CCC 1304). Confirmation also strengthens the bond of the Christian with the Church, through the Holy Spirit.

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 50-53

CCC, 1213-1321

YOUCAT, Part 2, pp. 116-123

*The Sacramental Mystery*, pp. 33-67, 75-93

*Sycamore* Film 14: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-14-the-sacraments-of-baptism-and-confirmation/>

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 11: The Eucharist (1): Source and Summit of the Christian Life**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

Matthew 26:26-28

*Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

### **Key Learning:**

*Lumen Gentium* famously identifies the Eucharist to be the “source and summit of the Christian life” (LG 11, cf. CCC 1324). This is an apt description as in the Eucharist Christ is present substantially, his one saving sacrifice is re-presented (made present) for the whole Church to participate in by making an offering of their lives and receiving his substantial presence to consume in Holy Communion. By this participation the Church, each individual member, becomes his body and more perfectly the sign of the unity between God and man and the human family (cf. LG 1).

In this unit we will examine the institution of the Eucharist by Christ before considering aspects of the meaning of the Sacrament. In the following unit we will look in more detail at the different parts of the Mass and its effects.

## ***Institution***

The Eucharist (also called the Mass) is above all the representation (making present) of the offering that Christ made of himself and celebrated in the Church's year at the Easter Triduum (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday). Much of the ritual of the central part of the Mass can be traced back to the Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with his apostles at the Last Supper. All three of the so called *synoptic Gospels* (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians provide an account of the Last Supper during which words which are spoken during the Mass are reported (cf. Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26). John's Gospel records the Last Supper in a different way and presents the essential aspects of the Eucharist differently too placing emphasis on service as the highest expression of love (cf. John 13:1-35). The Church recognises in these passages especially the institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood which makes the Eucharist possible.

The Eucharistic celebration is not merely a repeat of the Last Supper though, but of what the Last Supper represented, i.e. the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus that would follow. It is by virtue of the resurrection that Jesus is able to make himself present at every celebration of Mass.

The Eucharist is prefigured in the Old Testament in a number of ways: in the bread from heaven provided for the Jewish people as they wandered in the wilderness (cf.

Deuteronomy 8:3), in the annual Passover feast which celebrates the freeing of Israel from Egypt by the slaying of a lamb (cf. Exodus 12), in the establishment of the covenant with Moses by the sprinkling of blood from sacrificed animals on the people (cf. Exodus 24:3-8), in the atonement rituals associated with Yom Kippur (cf. Leviticus 16), and in the sacrifice of bread and wine offered by the priest Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18).

Earlier episodes in the life of Christ also point towards the Eucharist, notably the “feeding of the five thousand”, the only miracle reported in all four Gospels (John 6:1-15; Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17). During those accounts the same form of words found at Mass are used – “took, blessed, broke, gave”. In the Gospel of John the “bread of life discourse” which follows the feeding of the five thousand, emphasises its significance (John 6:22-71). After the resurrection, in the famous story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the connection to the Eucharist is very clear. Here, encountering Jesus on the road, the disciples first listen to him as he explains Scripture to them (Luke 24:27) before they eat together where Jesus “took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.” (Luke 24:30). In this moment, “their eyes were opened and they recognised him.” (Luke 24:31).

In all of these ways the evidence of Scripture points towards the central importance of the Eucharistic celebration for the Christian faith and the rituals, in their remembrance of the Last Supper, Jesus’ final Passover Meal, highlight that in Christ’s Paschal Mystery, the

Passover is fulfilled: the people of God are definitively freed from slavery, from all that goes against the fulness of life, even death itself (cf CCC 1340).

### ***Thanksgiving and Praise to the Father***

The word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving” and so the celebration of the Eucharist is first of all a sacrifice of thanksgiving for all of God’s creation and for all the blessings and gifts that God gives to us. Christ’s self gift gives glory to the Father (John 12:27-29) and the Church, in thanksgiving, offers her praise with Christ.

### ***Memorial Sacrifice***

As we discussed in a previous unit the Paschal Mystery of Christ is an event that transcends time and space and therefore is always present. The Eucharistic celebration then does not simply recall Christ’s sacrifice but re-presents it (that is makes it present) for us to participate in. Every Mass is a re-presentation of the one single sacrifice of Christ. Since the offering made is Christ himself it is truly worthy.

At the same time, through our participation, the sacrifice offered at Mass is the offering of the whole church. The people of God are united with Christ in making the offering. They bring “their lives, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work” (CCC 1368) represented by the bread and wine of the offering.



## ***Presence***

Through the words of Christ (spoken by the priest during the *Eucharistic Prayer*) and the power of the Holy Spirit (called down upon the gifts at the *epiclesis*) it is the faith of the Church that Christ is truly substantially present following consecration of the *Eucharistic Species* during Mass. The technical word deemed most fitting by the Church to describe this change in substance is *transubstantiation* (cf CCC 1376). This is sometimes referred to as the “real” presence in order to make a distinction between this, presence in the fullest sense, with other ways in which Christ is present to us (such as in his Word, in the poor, in the other sacraments of which he is the author cf. CCC 1373, 1375).

The real presence of Christ in the *Blessed Sacrament* is marked by particular reverence during and after Mass, in signs of adoration (genuflecting or bowing) before the Blessed Sacrament and the reservation of consecrated hosts with great care in a place of honour. The practice of “Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament” as a liturgical event in itself is also often practised where members of the faithful pray before the Blessed Sacrament which is either placed in a *monstrance* or in the *tabernacle*.

## ***Holy Communion***

Holy Communion is the fulfilment of the sacrifice (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:14-20) and for this reason the sacrifice is not complete until at least the priest has consumed the

consecrated bread and wine. To receive Holy Communion is to receive Christ himself and so all members of the Catholic Church who are present should receive Communion provided they are above the age of reason and suitably disposed (not aware of grave sin). Since the Sacrament of the Eucharist completes initiation into the Church, reception of Holy Communion amounts to a profession of faith in all that the Church believes. Thus those who are not members of the Catholic Church, except in very rare circumstances (see CCC 1398 to 1401), should not receive Holy Communion.

The Eucharist, as Holy Communion, comes to the Church as a gift from God and makes her what she is: the Body of Christ. By it she receives a share in the life of God and a pledge of the life to come, “Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6:53, cf. 1384, 1402-1405)

## ***Mission***

Nourished as the Body of Christ by Holy Communion the Church is “sent” into the world with the mission to become “living sacrifices” (cf. Romans 12:1). The word “Mass” is derived from this sending (*Missa*) so that what is celebrated at the Mass becomes the model for the life of the Christian and everything that makes up the life of the Christian is brought back and offered on the altar. In this sense we can see why the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life”.

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 54-57

CCC, 1322-1419

YOUCAT, Part 2, pp. 122-133

*The Sacramental Mystery*, 97-142

*Sycamore* Film 15: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-15-the-holy-eucharist/>

Bishop Robert Barron on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzCPu\\_lEhe8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzCPu_lEhe8)

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 12: The Eucharist (2): The Parts of the Mass and its Effects**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

Luke:24:13-35

*That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognising him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with*

*Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*

*So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

## **Key Learning:**

Paragraph 1345 of the CCC points to a letter of St Justin Martyr to the emperor Antonius from around the year 155 A.D. which describes the major parts of the Mass in a way that is familiar to us today from our own celebration:

*On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.*

*Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves . . .and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to*

*obtain eternal salvation. When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss. Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: 'Amen.' When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the "eucharisted" bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent.*

This goes to show that the ancient practice of the Church has been retained. In this unit we will look at the four major parts of the Mass before considering the effects or fruits of the Sacrament.

### ***The Introductory Rites***

The act of gathering in a church is in itself symbolic of the gathering together of the whole people of God. Every Mass is a celebration of the whole Church and is presided over invisibly by Christ, the head of the Church with his body participating. This includes the Church in heaven and all the angels and saints. All who are present participate actively in the Mass by their silent prayer, their responses, their praise, the offerings they make represented by the offering made during the Mass.



Once gathered, the Mass begins with the ***sign of the cross***, the prayer of the Holy Trinity in whose name and by whose power the Mass is celebrated. The people place themselves in an appropriate disposition with an acknowledgment of sin in the ***Penitential Act***. This is a reminder of God's ongoing love for us and an appeal that, by His grace, He continues to hold us in his mercy and sustain us.

Awareness of God's mercy brings the people to praise him and what follows on Sundays and feast days is the ***Gloria***, echoing the song of the angels in Bethlehem as they heralded the birth of Our Lord. In Advent and Lent the Gloria is omitted to recall the penitential nature of the seasons and to intensify the joy of the song when the feasts for which the seasons of preparation are observed are finally celebrated.

After the Gloria the priest invites the people to gather their thoughts before he leads the "Collect" prayer. This is so called because in it are gathered all of the prayers of the faithful for this Mass. Thus it should be preceded by a brief moment of silence during which those prayers are brought to mind.

### ***The Liturgy of the Word***

Following the Collect prayer the Word of God is proclaimed. On Sundays and solemnities usually two readings are read, one from the Old Testament and the Second usually a letter from the New Testament (during

Eastertide the first reading is also from the New Testament). In between those a Psalm is read which represents the response of praise from the people to God's own Word. Since the Psalms have the peculiar characteristic of being both the Word of God and the songs of the people we enter into dialogue with God, being taught by Him how to speak.

After the readings the Gospel is read with particular solemnity by an ordained minister and preceded by an acclamation verse. To add to the solemnity the people stand for the reading of the Gospel. After the Gospel the Liturgy of the Word continues as the priest or deacon gives a homily which should be directed to help the people to understand the Word of God and its significance for our lives. Following the Homily one of two ancient Creeds is professed to underline the unified and ancient faith shared by the people. The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Universal Prayer of the Faithful, where all gathered pray for the needs of the Church and the whole world including our own intentions and the needs of the local community.

### ***The Liturgy of the Eucharist***

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the offertory procession and the preparation of the gifts. The offertory procession ideally is made by members of the community representing all that is offered by them: this includes the bread and wine which will become the Eucharistic species, any financial or material offering that the community makes and all that the people wish to offer (their daily sacrifices of love, all the joys and the sorrows that are part of their life

and their prayers). The priest prays prayers of thanksgiving noting that what is being offered is done so by the grace of God since it all comes from His creation (“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you”).

The Eucharistic Prayer then begins with the preface in which the Church gives thanks to the Father and, led by the priest, sings a song of praise (cf. Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4:8). As we now reach the most solemn part of the Mass the congregation kneels as the priest continues with the Eucharistic prayer. Several versions of the Eucharistic prayer can be used but they all have common elements. First the Father is asked to send down the Holy Spirit so that by His power the bread and wine might become the Body and Blood of our Lord. This is called the *epiclesis*. Secondly, the words of Christ from the Last Supper are spoken by the priest (the “*institution narrative*”) and, in combination with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Body and Blood of Christ are made sacramentally present. There follows immediately a proclamation of the “mystery of faith” and then the *anamnesis*, or memorial, a prayer in which the priest, in the person of Christ, re-presents the one true sacrifice to the Father with the Church by which she prays for union with Him. The Eucharistic prayer continues recalling the special place of Mary and the saints, before intercessions including prayers for the Pope, the Bishop, those who have died and the whole Church. It concludes with the *doxology* giving glory to the Father through Christ, with Christ and in Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The people respond with the “Great Amen” which is an

affirmation of faith in all that has come before in the Eucharistic Prayer.

### ***The Communion Rite***

Following the Eucharistic Prayer the family of God unites and prays the prayer that our Lord taught us in the “Our Father”. Thereafter the priest prays for the peace of Christ and, recalling that Christ promised to bring peace, offers it to the people who then (where possible and customary) share it amongst one another by means of a sign.

Thus prepared the “bread” is broken and the people acknowledge the presence of the “Lamb of God”, on their knees as an act of reverence. Echoing the words of the Roman Centurion (cf. Matthew 8:8) they express both their unworthiness to receive so great a gift and their faith in its power to heal.

Following reception of Holy Communion and a final prayer the people are blessed and sent out into the world to share all that has been received.

### ***The Effects of the Sacrament of Eucharist***

As the source and summit of the Christian life (LG 11) we would expect the effects of the Eucharist to be significant. They are. In short they are what the Christian life is all about: union with Christ and with one another. Our union with Christ is effected by receiving His very Body and Blood. It is recommended that this should be done

frequently and even daily provided that the right dispositions are present.

Strengthening our union with Christ goes hand in hand with a growth in charity. As we reflect on the outward signs within the Mass and are drawn in to the reality that they represent Christ's own life becomes more and more the model for our own. We offer ourselves out of love for others, we grow in concern for the poor, the weak and the mistreated and we are preserved from sin. It also fills us with hope as it is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to be fulfilled as the Church awaits "the blessed hope and the coming of our saviour Jesus Christ." (cf. CCC 1402-1404).

As the principal means and measure of Christian unity the Eucharist is also a reminder of the unity that does exist and an incentive to work to heal the painful wounds of division.

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 95-97

CCC, 1345-1355

YOUCAT, Part 2, pp. 122-133

Diocese of Salford Youth Resource: A Journey through the Mass: <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/a-journey-through-the-mass-youth-resource/>

Diocese of Salford Hope in the Future Stage 3 Resources: <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/faith/hope/resources/>

Diocese of Salford Order of Mass Resource: <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Order-of-Mass-Booklet.pdf>

**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 13: The Sacraments of Healing – Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Sick**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

John 20:19-23

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

### **Key Learning:**

Once a Christian has been initiated into the Church, receiving the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, they are able to benefit from the other Sacraments that Christ has established. In this unit and the next we will look at the remaining four Sacraments. In the following unit we will look at the Sacraments of Mission: Marriage and Holy Orders; and in this one we will look at the Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Sick.

As with the Eucharist, Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Sick are Sacraments that can be received on more than



one occasion. We have described the Paschal Mystery of Christ as God's love story for us and the Liturgy, especially the Sacraments, as our way of accessing that love story. There are two times in our lives when it is especially important that we have access to that love: times when we are spiritually sick (i.e. aware that we have done wrong and damaged or broken our relationship with God) and times when we are physically sick which can also have an impact on our spirit and lead us into temptation that is beyond the physical impact of our condition. Christ established two Sacraments so that we would know God's love for us in these circumstances. In each case we will consider the evidence that Christ instituted the Sacrament, who can receive the Sacrament and why and the effects of the Sacrament.

## ***Reconciliation***

### *Institution:*

The need to be forgiven runs throughout the bible from the Old to the New Testament. In the Old Testament it is especially evident in the different sacrifices that were offered in the Temple, in the solemn "Day of Atonement", in the preaching of the Prophets and in the lives of certain of the leaders of the people, above all King David (cf. Psalm 50). As we have said sin separates us from God and the work of Christ was designed to repair that relationship. Thus, a means to receive forgiveness when needed is a necessary element in the Christian life.

Jesus' whole work is ultimately about the restoration of all of us to the right relationship with God and his life is marked by welcoming sinners back. In Jesus' teaching the theme of forgiveness plays a prominent part. A standout example is the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24) but we can also mention the parable of the unforgiving servant in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 18:21-35) or the petition in the Our Father that our trespasses be forgiven just as we forgive those who trespass against us (cf. Matthew 6:12). The more direct institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is generally traced back to two instances, one prior to the resurrection and one post-resurrection. The first is in the aftermath of Peter's confession of faith when Jesus promises to give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19). The second is found in the Gospel of John when Jesus enters into the locked room and breathes his Spirit on the Apostles saying, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:23). It is clearly an essential aspect of Jesus' mission to ensure that all have access to forgiveness even if it is equally clear that the precise mode of how that forgiveness would be granted was left to the Apostles and their successors to determine.

### *Recipient:*

We might wonder why the Sacrament of Reconciliation is necessary if Baptism wipes away the effects of all sin —

Original Sin and personal sins. Although Baptism does have these effects and is the beginning of the life of grace, we must persevere in that life and struggle daily to overcome the inclination to sin, which remains in us even after Baptism. Tradition calls this inclination concupiscence. Thus we are on a journey of “conversion” to Christ during which we will err occasionally and so the Sacrament is there to put us back on track.

The Sacrament should be received by anyone who is conscious of serious sin (mortal sin) because serious sin breaks our relationship with God. Three conditions must be present for an action or omission to be deemed a serious sin. First the actual matter of the action or omission must be serious. Second this must be known by the person responsible for the action. Finally it must be freely chosen. The absence of any of these three can remove or reduce culpability in an act.

Less serious sins can damage our relationship with God. These are known as venial sins. These do not have to be confessed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation but can be damaging if not noticed over time and so it is healthy to confess them occasionally. All Catholics should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once per year (so that they can also receive Holy Communion at Easter time) but more frequent use of the Sacrament is encouraged. A person who makes use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, known as the penitent, must have genuine remorse for what they have done or omitted to do and must firmly intend not to repeat the act or omission.

### *Effects:*

The primary effect of the Sacrament is, as the name suggests, reconciliation with God and with the Church. The penitent is restored to friendship with Christ, to the state of grace which is present immediately following Baptism. The Sacrament also restores the penitent's relationship with the Church which had been damaged by their actions or omissions. Sin is never a private thing, it always affects and damages a community. For this reason the form of the Sacrament involves the speaking of actions or omissions to a priest or bishop. The priest or bishop stands in the person of Christ but this is also an acknowledgement of wrongdoing to the community.

During the course of the Sacrament the priest will invite the penitent to complete an act of penance which is designed to help them to strengthen and rebuild their relationship with the Church. They may also offer counsel to the penitent to encourage them in their life of faith.

### ***The Sacrament of the Sick:***

#### *Institution:*

As part of the proclamation of the presence of the Kingdom of God Jesus' ministry involved the healing of the sick and the casting out of demons (for example see Mark 1:32). His apostles were sent out in his name to do the same (cf. Mark 6:12-13). While healing ministry of this kind remains present in the church through a specific charism of

the Holy Spirit (cf. CCC 1508), the Sacrament of the Sick received a more formal institution by Christ as evident in the letter of St James:

*“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”* (James 5:14-15)

Christ’s life demonstrated a particular compassion for the sick, which is retained in this Sacrament. Moreover, his healings, which announced the presence of his kingdom, demonstrated his mastery over all forms of evil of which physical and mental illness is just one expression. Thus, receiving the Sacrament of the sick, the recipient is able to experience the love of God in a profoundly difficult moment and be assured that, even there, God’s presence is near, overcoming all evil and especially the evil that is afflicting them in this moment.

*Recipient:*

Over time the Sacrament of the Sick came to be associated with proximity to death (and, by this association, received the name “Extreme Unction” (cf. CCC 1512)). The Second Vatican Council affirms that proximity to death is not necessary saying that the Sacrament, “is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this

sacrament has certainly already arrived.” (SC 73, cf. CCC 1514). The Sacrament is therefore for those who are seriously ill, although not necessarily on the point of death. The Sacrament can be repeated if a person’s health worsens during the course of the same illness or if they recover but then fall seriously ill again. It is also appropriate to administer the Sacrament prior to serious surgery.

As death approaches, it is especially appropriate to combine the Sacrament of the Sick with the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist (*Viaticum*) in order that the recipient is properly prepared to cross the threshold of this life and enter into the mercy of the Father. Depending on the circumstances different rites are appropriate for a person both immediately before and after death. Collectively these are known as the “Last Rites” although this label has incorrectly become associated with the Sacrament of the Sick itself.

### *Effects:*

The Sacrament has a number of effects. First is a strengthening and the growth of peace and courage to overcome the current difficulties. This comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit through the knowledge of the closeness of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament. It may lead to the restoration of health but the emphasis is on the salvation of the soul. Even if physical health is not restored, the suffering of the recipient is placed in its proper context by the Sacrament and is united with Christ’s own passion for their good and the good of the whole Church. Christ, in



other words, can be working to save others even through the suffering of the sick person. In the event that the recipient is not able to make a confession, the Sacrament also forgives sins. Finally the Sacrament prepares the sick person for the final journey to the Father's house (cf. CCC 1520-1523).

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 59-61

CCC, 1420-1532

YOUCAT, Part 2, pp. 133-143

*The Sacramental Mystery*, pp. 149-187, 193-213

*Sycamore* Film 16: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-16-forgiveness-healing-and-mission/>



**Notes and Questions:**

## **Unit 14: The Sacraments of Mission – Marriage and Holy Orders**

### **Scriptural Reflection:**

Mark 10:6-9

*But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”*

### **Key Learning:**

The CCC explains that the Sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders are directed towards the salvation of others. While they may well also contribute to the personal salvation of the people receiving the Sacraments, they do so because those people are now engaged in the mission of the Church, to build up the people of God. They are set aside (“consecrated”) in particular roles for this task (cf. CCC 1533-1535). There is much to discuss about these two Sacraments, more than we could hope to cover in this introductory course, so, as with the other Sacraments we will limit ourselves to consider first the evidence of institution by Christ, then the recipients and finally the effects.

## ***Marriage***

### *Institution:*

Clearly marriage between a man and a woman existed before Christ and indeed before the beginnings of the Old Testament, yet development in the law of the Jewish people and then the teaching of Christ raised its dignity. In Genesis the union of man and woman ordered to the creation of new life is blessed (Genesis 1:27-28), in the Ten Commandments marriage is protected (cf. Exodus 20:14, 17). In the prophets marriage was used as an image which communicated the faithfulness of God to His people (cf. for example Hosea 1-3, Isaiah 54, 62, Jeremiah 2-3; 31; Ezekiel 16, 23; Malachi 2:13-17). In the Wisdom literature, marriage and human love is presented as a way to understand God's love for us (e.g. the Song of Songs). Although divorce was permitted in limited circumstances in the Old Testament (cf. Deuteronomy 24:1-4) it was never part of God's original plan and this was emphatically confirmed in Jesus' preaching (cf. Mark 10:2-12; Matthew 19:1-12). For St Paul, marriage provides a suitable model for us to understand Christ's love for the Church (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Thus the institution of the natural union between man and woman in marriage is raised to the dignity of a Sacrament between two Christians through the gradual revelation of its meaning and the teaching of Christ. The CCC offers the following definition of marriage taken from *Canon Law*:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptised persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. (CCC 1601, cf. Code of Canon Law 1055 (s.1))

### *Recipients:*

In the Western tradition, the spouses confer the Sacrament on one another by the exchange of their mutual consent. Consent must be an act of the will by both and they must sufficiently understand the essential nature of what they are doing and do it freely. Thus they must intend, with their free expression of consent, that they will remain together always, that they will be faithful to one another and that they will be open to the gift of new life as the fruit of their union. Any serious restriction on freedom will render the marriage invalid, as would the existence of an impediment to marriage (for example the prior existence of a valid bond of marriage for one of the parties). Because of what marriage represents in the Sacrament – the total faithful love of God for His people and Christ for his Church – because it is in the very nature of the consent given by the spouses that their bond is unbreakable and because God seals this bond (cf. CCC 1639) divorce is not possible. It is possible, however, that, after a thorough examination of the original consent by the competent ecclesial tribunal, a marriage can be declared null. In these circumstances the Church declares that the marriage was never valid (for example

because of a lack of freedom, maturity and/or psychological condition of one of the parties). Since 1907 Catholics have also been required to follow a particular form of marriage where the consent of the couple is received in the name of the Church by a priest (or deacon) in the presence of two witnesses. Failure to follow the prescribed form would also be grounds for the marriage to be declared null by the Church.

### *Effects:*

The first effect of marriage is the bond between the man and the woman. By its nature it is “perpetual and exclusive” (CCC 1638) and “sealed by God himself” (CCC 1639) hence, “authentic married love is caught up into Divine love” (CCC 1639, cf, GS 48). The couple, in other words, enter into a new stage of their lives where they are reliant on God in a new way – to sustain and support them in their love and give them the gift of a family which they make themselves open to. Their bond puts them at the service of the people as a sign of God’s love in the world. From their bond, and their lives at the service of the people in openness and abandonment to God’s will in their lives, further grace follows which is ordered to their own growth in holiness and the growth in holiness of the whole Church.

## ***Holy Orders***

### *Institution:*

While most cultures and religions have a place for a mediating figure between the deity and the people, that figure received particular dignity in the Jewish tradition as the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, was specifically dedicated for Liturgical service (cf. Numbers 1:48-53). The role of the Levitical priests was to act on behalf of men in relation to God and to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (cf. CCC 1539, Hebrews 5:1, Exodus 29:1-30, Leviticus 8). As the CCC explains the priesthood was instituted to “proclaim the Word of God and to restore communion with God by sacrifices and prayer” (CCC 1540).

Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament priesthood. Indeed the essence of the priesthood is already present in the incarnation, in the very fact that in his person Christ forms a communion between God and man. Out of love for us he offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross. This is a unique sacrifice offered once and for all yet, as we have seen, is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church following the pattern established by Christ at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:17-29, Mark 14:12-16, Luke 22:7-13, cf. CCC 1545). Christ passed on the work of his priesthood to the twelve Apostles (prefigured in the twelve tribes of Israel) and gave Peter a particular role at its head (cf. Matthew 16:13-19, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16, Matthew 10:1-4). After the resurrection the Apostles were

commanded to go out and preach the good news and to baptise all nations teaching them all that Jesus had commanded (cf. Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:14-18).

The Church understands all of this as evidence for the institution of the priesthood by Christ by which he ensured that his priestly work of reconciling us to God would go on. The Church recognises three degrees of sacred orders established by Christ. First the episcopate (bishops) who are the successors of the Apostles. Second the presbyterate (priests) whose origin can be traced to the 72 selected to help the Apostles in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 10:1-20). Thirdly, the diaconate (deacons) whose mission to serve is implicit in Christ's mission of service. At the Second Vatican Council the Western Church restored the permanent diaconate as a "proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy", while the churches of the East had always retained it (cf. CCC 1571).

The Council also explained that the Episcopate represents the "fullness" of the Sacrament of Holy Orders (cf. CCC 1557). Just as the Eucharistic sacrifice makes present the one true sacrifice of Christ so too Episcopal ordination makes present the priesthood of Christ in the Bishop in an "eminent and visible manner" (cf. CCC 1558). The Bishop, in turn, shares this authority with his priests who are his co-workers to assist in the apostolic mission entrusted by Christ (cf. CCC 1562).

In short all share in the one priesthood of Christ. This includes the whole Church who participate in the



priesthood of Christ to be “priest, prophet and king” through Baptism and Confirmation. This is known as the common priesthood (cf. CCC 1546, 1547). The Ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood and is “a means by which Christ builds up and leads his Church”. It is therefore essentially different from the common priesthood and is given by its own Sacrament (CCC 1547).

### *Recipient:*

The Sacrament of Holy Orders can be received by men only, following the example laid down by Christ in his choosing of the Apostles and those who assisted them. As the CCC explains, “The Church recognises herself to be bound by the choice made by the Lord himself.” (CCC 1577). The Sacrament of Holy Orders is received by a man as a call from God and this is carefully discerned both by the individual and by the Church. In the West, the call to priesthood (but not permanent diaconate) includes the capacity to live a celibate life “for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:12) although this is a matter of discipline rather than proper to the essence of priesthood, as is evident from the practice in the East where married men can be ordained as deacons and priests. Bishops, even in the East, are chosen from among the celibate.

### *Effects:*

Ultimately the effects of the Sacrament of Holy Orders are prompted by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit directed

towards the ordained being enabled to act as the representative of Christ in his triple office of priest, prophet and king (cf. CCC 1581). As with Baptism and Confirmation, Holy Orders leaves an indelible mark or character on the recipient which cannot be removed, the ordained is changed forever. Although a priest can be discharged from the obligations and functions linked to ordination, the character he is given lasts for ever. As we saw in an earlier unit, the worthiness of the priest himself is not the crucial factor and unworthiness does not prevent Christ working in him (cf. CCC 1584). He becomes Christ's instrument and feels in himself the call to conversion. In the words of St John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, "The priest continues the work of redemption on earth...If we really understood the priest on earth, we would not die of fright but of love...The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus." (cf. CCC 1589).

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 62-65

CCC, 1533-1666

YOUCAT, Part 2, pp. 143-155

*The Sacramental Mystery*, pp. 217-256, 261-288

*Sycamore* Film 17: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-17-the-christian-vocations/>

**Notes and Questions:**

## Unit 15: Catholic Social Teaching: Fundamentals of the Moral Life

### Scriptural Reflection:

John 15:1-11

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

## **Key Learning:**

So far in this programme we have looked at how God has come to seek us, gave us His Son to find us and bring us back to Him and at how Jesus' work of bringing us and others back to God continues in the Church. In the next two units we will look at our response to that: the way we live our lives.

It is important that we frame things this way. We respond to God's grace in our lives, to His invitation, to His love. This is how Pope Benedict XVI describes the Christian life:

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”  
(*Deus Caritas Est*, 1)

Our encounter with Jesus, especially in the Sacraments, leads us to recognise a fundamental truth about ourselves: that we are loved. We are created for a reason and our lives have direction and meaning. All that follows in our lives is a response to this fundamental encounter.

## ***Dignity of the Human Person***

Underlying all that the Catholic Church teaches about our ethical lives (that is about how we act and engage individually and in society) is the principle that every human life has a value that cannot be negated. Christians believe that every human being is created in the “image and

likeness of God”, based on the opening chapter of the bible,

*“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air; and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them...” (Genesis 1:26-28)*

It is hard to underestimate the importance of this principle or its wide reaching effects. Everything that the Catholic Church teaches about human behaviour is grounded on it. It is the tree trunk that determines the branches. One of the challenges for teaching Catholic social principles is that we can lose sight of the tree trunk while we are tending to the branches!

### ***Command to love***

It follows from this underlying principle that the only appropriate response to another human person is love and this is what is expressed in the New Testament command to love. We see this command in its fullest terms in chapter 13 of the Gospel of John:

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)*

We know that to love “even as I have loved you”, as Jesus teaches his disciples, is to love in an unlimited way, even to the point of loving our enemies (cf. Matthew 5:44). Jesus gave his life out of love. The Christian call too is to “give themselves” to others in love. Responding to a Christian vocation (to married life, Holy Orders, or consecrated single life) is ultimately a response to love and a means of “giving oneself away”.

## ***Response to Grace***

What we have been describing here is a response to an encounter with grace. Grace comes first and the human response follows. The CCC defines grace as “favour, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons [and daughters], partakers of the Divine nature and of eternal life” (cf. CCC 1996). We should avoid thinking of grace as something that is out of our reach. Indeed, after 2000 years of Christian living in the world, the work of grace is present all around us in so many ways. It is present in those elements of our societies that are founded on a Christian world view, it is present in family life, in art, literature, film, theatre, in the stories of the lives of the saints and martyrs. It is present in our own families and in the people we know whose lives reflect the life of Christ, in their self-giving love, however faintly. Most of all it is present in the Word of God, that reaches us either directly or through intermediary channels and in the Sacraments, even if we are not yet direct recipients of the Sacraments. Attending a course on Christian initiation in itself is evidence that a person has at



some stage come into contact with grace which has prompted a response.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, grace is received in a particular way, known as Sanctifying grace. This is “the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.” (CCC 1999). To receive this kind of grace at Baptism means to begin to participate in the life of God already, to become his adoptive children. Sanctifying grace is also called habitual grace since “it is a permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God’s call” (CCC 2000). Grace also comes to us in the form of “actual graces” which are God’s interventions in our lives at specific moments that help us in the course of our journeys. Actual graces come in lots of different forms, in the context of triumphs as well as trials.

Grace itself is not something we can point to, indeed it can only be recognised through the eyes of faith, but it can be seen in its effects. A person who has had a genuine encounter with grace will grow in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord (cf. CCC 1830). In turn the fruits of the Holy Spirit will be more evident in their lives. These fruits are classically identified as peace, joy, charity, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, generosity, self control, modesty, chastity and faithfulness (cf. Galatians 5:22-23, CCC 1831). As we respond more fully to the work of the Holy Spirit in us, our lives abound more and more with these fruits.

## ***A Life of Virtue***

The Christian life is a life of virtue on two levels. First on the theological level and then on the natural or human level. The Theological Virtues are so called because they relate directly to God (“Theos”) since they “adapt man’s faculties for the participation in the Divine nature” (cf. CCC 1812, 2 Peter 1:4). They are the gifts of faith, hope and charity and are the “foundation of Christian moral action” (CCC 1813). By their gift to us in Baptism we believe in God (faith), hope in eternal life as the answer to our desire for happiness (hope) and love God and our neighbour (charity). (cf. CCC 1814-1829).

Founded on the Theological Virtues, the life of a Christian seeks to build human or natural virtues which are “stable dispositions...of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith.” (CCC 1804). By growing in virtue by our efforts in response to grace it becomes easy and joyful to do what is good rather than what is damaging to us and others. The four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance are particularly important and all other virtues are grouped around them. Prudence concerns practical reason and the choosing of the good way to act in every circumstance. Justice is the virtue of dealing well with God and neighbour – “to give others what they are due”. It has to do with living in harmony. Fortitude is the natural virtue concerned with overcoming fear and remaining steadfast in pursuing the good. Temperance is the virtue that concerns the attraction of pleasures and ensures moderation.

## **Conscience**

When it comes to discerning the rights and wrongs of actions we are not left entirely alone, we have what is known as conscience to guide us. The CCC offers the following summary of conscience taken from *Gaudium et Spes*,

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. (GS 16, cf. CCC 1776)

Following conscience is not the same as saying that we can do whatever it is we think is right. What is described in *Gaudium et Spes* 16 (above) is only part of the full picture of what we generally understand to be the act of conscience. It is also necessary that a person **recognise** the “voice” that “echoes in his depths” to be “the law written by God”, that they take it into account in a given situation and then make a **judgment** on how to act. The “voice” can go unrecognised and be ignored. The conscience has to be properly formed, which is a lifelong task, so that the “voice” is heard and recognised as authentic (cf. CCC 1784). While a person must always act “in line with their conscience” (cf. CCC 1790), this is not the same as acting “in line with their

judgment”, which may be flawed when the inner voice is unrecognised, silenced or ignored (cf. CCC 1792).

## ***Freedom***

It should be obvious by now that the moral life for a Christian is far more than following lists of rules. Christian morality is about becoming more and more “free”. To be free comes from the fact that we are made in God’s “image and likeness” and that freedom is not so that we can do whatever we want whenever we want but so that we can choose to do what is good. The example of playing the piano is helpful. We are all free to push the keys in any order we want and make a terrible noise. Is this really freedom? There is a right order to push the keys so that the sound that comes out is a work of beauty. In a similar way the moral life of a Christian leads to greater beauty, to greater freedom in our lives, to greater happiness and joy. Our history has shown us that what limits us is when we do not cooperate with God’s plan. As Jesus teaches us, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11).

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 66-82

CCC, 1691-1876, 1949-1051

YOUCAT, Part 3

*Sycamore* Film 9: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-9-finding-true-freedom/>

*Sycamore* Film 10: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-10-the-meaning-of-love/>

**Notes and Questions:**

## Unit 16: Catholic Social Teaching: Core Principles

### Scriptural Reflection:

Matthew 25:31-46

*“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it*



*not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

## **Key Learning:**

The human person is by nature a social being (cf. CCC 1879), therefore, living in society is not an optional extra but essential. All that is true for an individual (which was largely the focus of the previous unit) has to be applied in the social context. This has always been part of the Christian faith from its origins in the election of the people of Israel as God’s chosen people, through to the various provisions of the law given in the Old Testament which were directed to how the community of God’s people should live, into the New Testament when the law was synthesised to the two greatest commandments of love of God and love of neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-28) and made personal to Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). Christian concern for the world in which we live has been a feature of Christian life from the Early Church as is evident in the works of the Fathers of the Church. The Christian cannot understand himself without reference to others, nor can he live authentically without seeking to influence the world he shares in light of what he has come to recognise as true:

*“For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)*

The life of the Holy Spirit in the Church is best judged in the practical action of her members, especially the saints. A

fine synthesis of the proper response of a Christian to his neighbour is largely based on the parable of the sheep and the goats, to see Christ in those he meets, and expressed in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, bury the dead, correct the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive wrongs done and pray for the living and the dead. A life lived marked by these works of mercy is a life marked by the Holy Spirit. St Teresa of Calcutta, whose life was certainly marked by the Holy Spirit, made the parable of the sheep and the goats into a design for her life and that of the religious order that she founded. She would famously take the hand of those who would ask her how she did such work and, on each of their five fingers, pointedly say the words, “YOU DID IT TO ME!” (Matthew 25:40)

### ***The Christian and Public Life***

As the CCC teaches, “all men are called to the same end: God himself” (CCC 1878) and it is part of the Christian vocation to help to shape a society ordered in such a way as to help us find our way to God. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical letter entitled *Rerum Novarum* (“Of New Things”) which marked the beginning of a new era of Catholic teaching on social issues in the industrial and post industrial age. Here we will introduce some of the principles that have emerged from the body of “Catholic Social Teaching” that has built up especially over the past 130 years.

## ***The Dignity of the Human Person***

We have already seen in the previous unit how all of the moral life of the Church and its members is first of all grounded on the principle that every human life is sacred and must be protected. This remains the unshakeable guiding principle for all of the Church's social teaching.

## ***The Common Good***

Flowing from this core principle it is recognised that all human beings share this dignity equally. Living in society together we have a duty to work for the good of all. The CCC explains that the Common Good consists of three essential elements (cf. CCC 1907-1909): 1) respect for the person as such, especially that the person is given the capacity in society for the exercise of natural freedoms, including freedom of religion; 2) social well being and development of the society itself, including access for all to lead “a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family and so on”; 3) the Common Good requires peace, understood as “the stability and security of a just order”.

## ***Preferential Option for the Poor***

An essential characteristic of Catholic Social Teaching is a particular awareness of the poor and marginalised. This is not new: the model comes from Jesus himself, but it has a new meaning and context in our modern era when

inequalities between the rich and the poor are becoming more and more pronounced. Some of the Church's greatest saints are those who have taken Jesus at his word when he spoke to the rich young man on the road, "go, sell what you have, and give to the poor" (Mark 10:21; cf. Matthew 19:16-30, Luke 18:18-30). Pope Francis has made the Church's concern for the poor a central feature of his pontificate, recognising, amongst other things, how much the poor have to teach us. In his words,

"If the Church disowns the poor, she ceases to be the Church of Jesus; she falls back on the old temptation to become a moral or intellectual elite. There is only one word for the Church that becomes a stranger to the poor: 'scandal.'"<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' and the Church's concern for the poor extends beyond the economically poor and, with a certain degree of overlap, includes those who are exploited and abused by the powerful in so many ways: victims of human trafficking and "modern" slavery, immigrants and refugees, and the supposed weaker members of society – especially the elderly, the unborn and the disabled.

### ***Universal Destination of Goods and Solidarity***

Immediately related to the demand to work for the Common Good and the preferential option for the poor are the two connected principles of the universal destination of

---

<sup>2</sup> From Pope Francis in Conversation with Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, Simon and Schuster (2020), p. 120.

goods and solidarity. The universal destination of goods recognises that what has been given to us by God has been given for all to share and benefit from. Private ownership is therefore a limited right understood in this broader context such that those things that are legitimately privately owned are seen as contributing in some way to the good of all<sup>3</sup>.

Solidarity, in turn, is the principle of Christian and human brotherhood, that when one part of the body suffers, the whole suffers. Again, Pope Francis reminds us often that “everything is connected”.

## ***Subsidiarity***

The principle of subsidiarity is about respecting the rights of individuals and groups to determine their own destiny, rather than imposing on them a system from above. It protects against the undue intervention of the state such that decisions are made and activities managed by the lowest level of competent authority. Subsidiarity also guards against patronising groups, even with supposed good intentions. Higher levels of authority should help and support lower levels with a view to the Common Good (cf. CCC 1883).

## ***Family Life and the Dignity of Work***

The Church sees the family as the “original cell of social life” (CCC 2207). It is essential to the flourishing of each individual and society as a whole that family life is strong.

---

<sup>3</sup> cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC), 178

“The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God, and make good use of freedom.” (CCC 2207) A society that is ordered to the Common Good therefore is one in which the conditions are present for family life to flourish. This means, amongst other things, that families have the ability to support themselves and all are able to work to earn a reasonable wage. Work has an important role to play in social life. Participating in work means to use the talents God has given to contribute to the greater good. Devoting oneself to a task daily follows the example of Jesus the carpenter and can be an expression of discipleship and a means towards holiness (cf. CCC 2427). The State must take responsibility to ensure that sufficient work is available for all.

### ***The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor***

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS) Pope Francis has highlighted the urgent need to respond to the environmental crises that are facing the world. He bemoans the mistreatment of nature which has been manipulated to maximise profits for too long without concern for the consequences. A key idea in the writings of the Pope is that “everything is connected” and the way that we treat the environment is reflected in the way we treat one another: with contempt and disregard. The Pope therefore urges us towards an “ecological conversion” by which we hear the “cry of the earth” and the “cry of the poor”. As he puts it, “Our relationship with the environment can never be



isolated from our relationship with others and with God.”  
(LS 119).

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 83-85

CCC, 1877-1948

YOUCAT, Part 3

*Sycamore* Film 18 : <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-18-the-social-teaching-of-the-church/>



**Notes and Questions:**

## Unit 17: What Comes Next?

### Scriptural Reflection:

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

*Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

*“Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

*“O death, where is thy victory?”*

*O death, where is thy sting?”*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

### Key Learning:

In the previous two chapters we have introduced different elements of the practical life of a Christian: how a Christian should act. Jesus taught that it is not just what we think or believe that matters but what we do, how we live. We believe that what we do matters and our actions will have consequences in this life and beyond. In this unit we

will consider what the Church believes about what is beyond. Over the centuries, speculation by Christian thinkers on the so called “Four Last Things” – death, judgment, heaven and hell – has captured the popular imagination. Some of this is helpful but some of it distorts our understanding.

The best place to begin is in the Creeds. The Nicene Creed says “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”. The Apostles’ Creed says, “I believe in... the resurrection of the body.”

We believe this, not as a consequence of wishful thinking, but because Christ rose from the dead as “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:20) Christians believe that Christ’s resurrection opened up for us a new stage in our own lives, which we are granted a share in by virtue of our Baptism.

The resurrection is of the whole person, including the body. While this may seem impossible to us, it is worth remembering that the physical matter that makes up our bodies changes many times during the course of our lifetimes so, whether cremated or buried, belief in the bodily resurrection is not negated by the destruction or decay of the atoms that make us up at the time of our death. Indeed, the biblical evidence of the resurrection as it relates to Christ suggests that there are some things similar and some things different about the body in resurrected form.

Our participation in the resurrection of Christ is related to the hope for a “new heaven and a new earth” (cf. Revelation 21-22) and the glorious second coming of Christ. Christians are people in waiting for this event, as we pray after the Our Father during Mass, “we wait in blessed hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ”.

Clearly, from our point of view, there is a time lag between the death of an individual and the glorious second coming of Christ that we await (and therefore bodily resurrection of the dead). During this time period the Church believes that the person continues to live in a spiritual way – the soul of the person continues to exist temporarily apart from the body.

After death, the Church believes that there will be judgment. In chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus presents himself as judge very clearly as we have seen. Elsewhere he speaks with little room for ambiguity about the consequences of actions and the need for vigilance (for example Matthew 13:24-30; 25:1-30, Luke 16:19-31). For Christians, that there will be judgment is not a cause for fear but for hope, that there will be the restoration of justice: that the good will find eternal happiness and that the wicked will suffer the consequences of their actions. Even if we don’t necessarily hope for the latter, indeed out of charity we hope that all will be saved, nevertheless it must be acknowledged that while the invitation to the banquet has been sent to all, not all have accepted the invitation (cf. Matthew 22:1-12, Luke 14:16-24).

While the just will find eternal happiness, the Church uses the term “hell” to designate the eternal state of those who have rejected God. Thinkers have speculated that while this is not willed by God, it can be chosen by individuals for themselves. Without that option, free will is denied. If we understand that God is love (cf. 1 John 4:16) then those who reject God reject love. To reject love is to live only for yourself, to become impenetrable to the reach of another. This is an apt description for the state of hell.

Finally the Church believes that there is the possibility of purification after death. This might come as a relief for many!! This is what the Church means by purgatory. A time in which the “fires of God’s love” purify us and ready us to see God face to face (cf. Revelation 22:4) for “when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

The “Last Judgment” will follow immediately after the resurrection of the dead and coincide with the second coming of Christ. This will be the definitive victory of good over evil and fulfil the plan of God for all things to be united in Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:10, 22; CCC 677-682).

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 44-45

CCC, 668-682, 976-1060

YOUCAT, Part 1, pp. 92-99

*Sycamore* Film 20a: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-20-mary-and-the-hope-of-heaven/>

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 10 “World Without End: The Last Things”

**Notes and Questions:**



## Unit 18: Mary and The Communion of Saints

### Scriptural Reflection:

Luke 1:26-31

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

*And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."*

*And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

## **Key Learning:**

One of the things most misunderstood about what Catholics believe is the place that Mary holds in our faith. Outside of Catholic circles it is sometimes thought that Catholics *worship* Mary. This is not true. Catholics, worship God, the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Catholics do hold a special place for Mary in the faith though. She is highly honoured due to the role that she played in our salvation by cooperating with God's plan and agreeing to be the mother of Jesus. God honoured Mary by giving her this role in His plan, so we give to Mary the honour that is her due. Pope Francis likes to pray to Mary under the title "Untier of Knots" and, in a sense, she is the one who untied the great knot of humanity's disobedience by her obedience to God in her "fiat", "let it be to me according to your word." The Fathers of the Church spoke of Mary as the new Eve, just as they spoke of Christ as the new Adam. Just as we were condemned by the disobedience of Eve, we are saved by the obedience of Mary. What the Church believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ and points towards Him (cf CCC 487).

## ***Mother of Jesus and Mother of God***

In the Gospels Mary is revealed as "Mother of Jesus". She conceived Him by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:20). Mary is the human who gave Jesus His human flesh. But the Church discerned that, since Jesus is the Eternal Son of God, Mary can also be called "Mother of God" ("Theotokos"). This was decreed at one of the

early Ecumenical Councils of the Church at Ephesus in the year 431.

### ***Mother of the Church***

Mary is also “Mother of the Church”. This follows since the Church is the “Body of Christ”. Her motherhood of the Church was made manifest in a particular way in the crucifixion scene in the Gospel of John when Jesus turned to his mother and said, “Woman, behold, your Son!”. Then he said to the Beloved Disciple, “Behold, your mother!” (John 19:26-27). Jesus’ use of the apparently unusual “woman” in this exchange recalls the first man and the first woman in the Garden of Eden. The “mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20) now becomes the “Mother of the Church”.

Mary’s role as Mother of the Church is shown in the Acts of the Apostles in her presence with the Apostles in the Upper Room at Pentecost where they prayed together before the Holy Spirit came down upon them (Acts 1:14, 2:1-4).

### ***Virgin Most Pure***

As we have said Catholics believe that Mary conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. She remained a virgin before, during and after her birth. Belief in this teaching about Mary can be difficult for some and, as such, is precisely a point worthy of reflection. In Mary, God demonstrated his power over nature: both the material and

the spiritual realm. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “If God does not also have power over matter, then he is simply not God.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***Immaculately Conceived***

In 1854, Pope Pius IX declared as dogma a belief that the Church had held always that:

“The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.”

(Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854)

This is known as the dogma of the “Immaculate Conception”, a feast day that the Church celebrates on 8th December every year. The dogma points towards Christ. It is through His merits that this grace was granted to Mary and, so that she might be able to give her free assent, that she be conceived in this way. The dogma makes sense of the greeting of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, “Hail, full of grace!”

### ***Assumed Body and Soul into Heaven***

A second, and related, dogma of the Blessed Virgin Mary was defined in 1950 by Pope Pius XII, as follows:

---

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, Image (New York) 2012, p. 57.

“...the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death.”

(Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950)

It follows from the fact that Mary, conceived without sin, completely attuned to the will of God her whole life and purified by her witness to the suffering of her Son, would show the way to glory to her children.

### ***“Type” of the Church***

In all these things Mary is what is known as a “type” of the Church. *Typology* is a mode of communication in Revelation. A “type” comes first and prefigures a reality of what is still to come. For example, Noah’s ark is often recognised to be a “type” of the Church; the crossing of the Red Sea a “type” of Baptism; the Passover in Egypt, a “type” of Easter. Mary is recognised as a “type” of the Church. What is said of Mary can be said of the Church. She is the one in whom the Word became flesh. So the Church has to give “flesh” to the Word of God now. She is the one who “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (cf. Luke 2:19, cf. 2:51). So the Church receives the Word of God and ponders it. She is the one who said to the angel, “Let it be done to me”. So the Church strives to do

the will of God. She is the one assumed body and soul into heaven. So the Church follows, anticipating the glory of eternal life. In this final sense, above all, Mary leads us through life towards Her Son. She is the preeminent disciple.

## ***Marian Apparitions***

Mary continues to be active in the Church especially as a figure of devotion for the faithful and an intercessor. Over the centuries there have been a number of private revelations concerning Mary where she has been seen by members of the faithful and passed on important messages. Private revelations do not form part of the deposit of faith and the faithful are free to believe them or not<sup>5</sup>. There have been many significant Marian Apparitions which have led to great devotion, conversion of hearts and the outpouring of charity. These include apparitions in Walsingham (England), Guadalupe (Mexico), Lourdes (France), Pontmain (France), Knock (Ireland) and Fatima (Portugal). The messages of these events share common ground often encouraging the faithful in prayer, penance, devotion and works of charity. The Church continues to investigate and reflect on the ongoing phenomena in Medjugorje, Bosnia, where “visionaries” have reported the experience of seeing and communicating with Mary over several decades.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Church takes claims of supernatural phenomenon seriously and investigates such claims carefully under rules updated in May 2024 in a document issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled, "Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena".



## ***The Company of the Saints***

Mary's place as an intercessor for the Church is part of a wider belief that follows from what we learnt in a previous unit about what comes after our death. The Church exists in three "states". The "pilgrim church on earth" of which all of the living baptised are part, those who have died and are being "purified" and those who have died and are in glory (cf. CCC 954). This latter group are what we commonly call "saints", although in a wider sense "saints" is used in the New Testament to refer to all members of the Church.

The Saints, in the sense commonly understood, are those who have lived lives that are particularly worthy and of whom the Church has officially declared their holiness. They are held up as examples for the faithful to follow, they are, in a sense, examples of what the Church wishes to be. There is a lengthy process involved in being declared a saint which usually takes several decades and is overseen by a Dicastery in the Vatican known as the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. Deceased members of the Church can first be declared a "Servant of God", then "Venerable", then Beatified and known as "Blessed" before finally being Canonised and declared a "Saint". At different stages, the deceased person must be declared to have lived a life of "heroic virtue" and, normally, before sainthood, at least 2 miracles must be identified to be a result of their intercession. These miracles are typically cures for sickness which no medical cause explains.



While the Church exists and is sustained because of the merits of the work of Christ and Mary holds a place of preeminence within the communion of Saints, the Church considers all declared saints, because of the merits of their lives, to be effective intercessors. The miracles ascribed to them are proof of this. As a consequence all Christians are encouraged to pray to the saints and to adopt them as patrons, which they do in a particular way at Baptism and Confirmation.

The saints come from all walks of life, are of all ages and backgrounds and bore witness to Christ in many different ways. From those who devoted their lives to serve the poor like St Francis of Assisi, St Vincent de Paul or Saint Teresa of Calcutta; to the great mystical Saints like St Teresa of Avila, St Therese of Lisieux and St John of the Cross; the great religious founders like St Benedict and St Ignatius; great intellectuals like St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, St John Henry Newman and Pope St John Paul II; to the many martyrs of the Church from the Apostles and martyrs of the early Church to those of the 20th and 21st Centuries like St Maximilian Kolbe and St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein).

At the same time, the Church also holds that most of those who are enjoying the glory of God now are not known to us. On November 1st each year the Church celebrates the Feast of All Saints where we remember all those saints whose lives bore witness to the love of God who did not become widely known. These can include members of our own family, friends and colleagues who quietly lived faithful

lives, exuding the charity of God in their own way. The saints pray for us, show us how to live and give us hope.

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 43-44

CCC, 487-511, 963-975, 946-948, 954-957

YOUCAT, Part 1, pp. 54-57, 91-92

*Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, pp. 51-57

*Sycamore* Film 20b and c: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-20-mary-and-the-hope-of-heaven/>

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 4 “Our Tainted Nature’s Solitary Boast: Mary, the Mother of God”

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 8 “A Vast Company of Witnesses: The Communion of Saints”

**Notes and Questions:**

## Unit 19: The Necessity of Prayer

### Scriptural Reflection:

Matthew 6:7-13

*‘And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:*

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we also have forgiven our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.”*

### Key Learning:

The definition of prayer offered by the CCC is from St John Damascene, a 7th Century monk, who defined prayer as “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.” (cf. CCC 2559, 2590). St Therese of Lisieux says, “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love embracing both trial and joy.” (cf. CCC 2558). The CCC devotes the entirety of its

Part Four to prayer which demonstrates its essential place at the heart of the Christian life. Prayer is a recognition of the reality that “man is in search of God” (cf. CCC 2566). It is in his nature to seek Him as the fulfilment of his heart’s desire. In prayer, “God calls man first” (cf. CCC 2567). This is the privileged place where God reveals himself to man. Through prayer we are drawn into this encounter as, slowly, in the words of St Francis De Sales, “heart speaks unto heart”<sup>6</sup>.

There is so much that can be said about prayer and here we will only look at some basic definitions. We will begin by making an essential distinction between the two main categories of prayer in the Church and then we will look at what the CCC calls the three expressions of prayer.

### ***Two Categories of Prayer: Liturgical Prayer and Private Prayer***

There are essentially two categories of prayer that are important to distinguish as they are different in nature. First is Liturgical Prayer (also known as the public prayer of the Church or priestly prayer). In this kind of prayer we are joining with the prayer and work of Christ who continues his saving work for the world. It includes the Sacraments, preeminently Mass, and the *Liturgy of the Hours*. The second category of prayer is private prayer (also known as devotional or affective prayer). In this form of prayer the aim is to grow in our personal relationship with Christ.

---

<sup>6</sup> These words were taken as his motto by English saint John Henry Newman when he became a Cardinal.

It can be challenging to keep track of which type of prayer is which and this task is not made easier when we realise that public prayer is public even when it is done in private and private prayer is still private even if done with 50,000 others in a stadium. What on earth does that mean? Well, often priests, religious and lay people may pray the Liturgy of the Hours alone. This is part of the public prayer of the Church, part of the Liturgy. At the same time at, say, a youth festival when a rosary is said, it is a private devotion. The labels “public” and “private” concern the nature of the prayer, not the numbers of people involved in praying.

### ***Expressions of Prayer:***

Prayer begins with “composure of the heart” (CCC 2699) and directing ourselves towards God. It can involve praise, thanksgiving, repentance, petition and intercession. Three major expressions of prayer are employed in both public and private prayer. These are the following:

#### *Vocal Prayer*

As the heart turns to God our intentions are expressed in spoken words and actions. The senses become part of our prayer expression. Thus the tradition has developed certain prayers that are spoken out loud (for example the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Sign of the Cross, the Glory Be). Vocal prayers express the interior intention and the more formulaic prayers of the tradition (such as the Our Father, Hail Mary and the Psalms) act to a certain degree as guiding lights that lead our hearts and our senses to God.

Thus, while the heart is always engaged in vocal prayer, the more perfect expression involves a correspondence between what the heart intends and what the words of the prayers express.

### *Meditation*

The CCC describes meditation as a “quest”. “The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking.” (CCC 2705). In meditation we are guided by helps like Sacred Scripture, *lectio divina*, the Rosary, spiritual reading and holy images that draw us in to what God wants to reveal to us. We are also guided by the circumstances of our own lives which we bring to our encounter with God in meditative prayer. The whole of ourselves is involved and through the faithful devotion to the discipline of prayer, with open hearts, we find that we are moulded to follow Christ with greater conviction.

### *Contemplation*

If meditative prayer is defined as a quest then contemplative prayer is best defined in contrast to that as a silent stillness, a “gaze of faith fixed on Jesus” (CCC 2724), a “silent love” (CCC 2724). It comes to a person as a grace and can only be accepted in humility and poverty (CCC 2713). It is not simply being passive since presence is required, which follows an act of the will. The one who prays in this way desires to be in the presence of God, knows themselves as a child of God and allows themselves



to be loved in this way. In the words of St John Vianney, “I look at him and he looks at me.” (cf. CCC 2715).

## ***Growth in the Spiritual Life***

We began our course with the question “What is the purpose of life?” We learnt that the Church believes it has an answer to this question, summarised in the very first paragraph of the CCC, “In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life.” (CCC, 1). This was put another way when we considered the reason why God became man, “The Word became flesh to make us *‘partakers of the Divine nature’*” (CCC 460, cf. 2 Peter 1:4). St Irenaeus spoke even more directly, “For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving Divine sonship, might become a son of God.” (cf. CCC 460). This is the goal of our lives and the purpose of growth in the spiritual life: to encounter God and to deepen our communion with Him. The mystical tradition of the Church testifies to a process in which a person travels towards God, living among and overcoming the trials and tribulations of life so that God becomes the only goal. The great Spanish mystical saint, John of the Cross, describes this journey as like ascending a mountain where we gradually move upwards towards God, slowly releasing the different attachments that keep us apart from Him. The life we live, the people we share it with, the trials and challenges we face and the joys we experience being in every way essential to our journey. All pass away,

but, in the end, only He remains. Our prayer is an indispensable dimension of our journey. The privileged place where our search for Him is at its most intense and where He comes to meet us. As we reach the summit of our individual mountain, we hope that we can pray with the Psalmist:

*There is one thing I ask of the Lord,  
for this I long,  
to live in the house of the Lord,  
all the days of my life,  
to savour the sweetness of the Lord,  
to behold his temple.*

(Psalm 26)

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

*Credo*, pp. 87-94, 103-105

CCC Part 4, especially 2558-2649, 2697-2724

YOUCAT, Part 4

*Sacred Fire*, pp. 168-210.

*Sycamore* Film 8: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-8-the-power-of-prayer/>

*Sycamore* Film 19: <https://www.sycamore.fm/videos/session-19-how-to-pray/>

*Catholicism* with Bishop Robert Barron - Episode 9 “The Fire of His Love: Prayer and the Life of the Spirit”

**Notes and Questions:**

## Unit 20: Overview of the Celebration of Christian Initiation for Adults

### Scriptural Reflection:

Ephesians 1:3-10, 13-14

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ...And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

## **Key Learning:**

This unit will be a practical preparation for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.

## **Appendix 1: Important Catholic Texts and Prayers**

### ***The Nicene Creed:***

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God,  
Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation he came down from  
heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### ***The Apostles' Creed***

I 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 into hell;  
on the third day he rose 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 Lord's Prayer***

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## ***Hail Mary***

Hail Mary  
full of grace, the Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of  
thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at  
the hour of our death. Amen.

## ***Glory Be***

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy  
Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

## ***Come Holy Spirit***

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

## ***Prayer to St Michael the Archangel***

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil; May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all evil spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls. Amen

## Glossary

*(Where available definitions are taken from the Glossary in the CCC).*

Actual graces	Specific helps that God gives us to conform our lives to his will.
Agnosticism	The belief that the existence of God is not known or knowable.
Anamnesis	The “remembrance” of God’s saving deeds in history in the liturgical action of the Church which leads to thanksgiving and praise (see CCC 1103). Every Eucharistic Prayer contains an anamnesis when the Church calls to mind the Passion, Resurrection and glorious return of Jesus.
Apostles’ Creed	A statement of the Christian faith developed from the ancient Church of Rome. The Apostles’ Creed is considered to be a faithful summary of the faith of the Apostles (cf. CCC 194).
Apostolic Succession	The passing on of the authority of the Apostles to their successors, the Bishops, through the laying on of hands. Apostolic Succession is an essential element in the Church’s self understanding that guarantees She remains the Church of Christ.
Atheism	The system of belief that denies the existence of God.
Atone, Atonement	Atonement is the act of reparation or satisfaction for sin. In the Christian tradition one element of understanding the death of Christ, given greater or lesser emphasis through the ages, is to atone for the sin of humanity. This understanding of Christ’s death was expressed most lucidly by St Anselm of Canterbury at the end of the 11th Century.
Blessed Sacrament	A term often used to describe the consecrated host, the real presence of Jesus.
Canon Law	The official name for the laws that govern the Church.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)	The official collection of the teachings of the Catholic Church first published in a comprehensive and unified form in Latin in 1994 during the pontificate of Pope St John Paul II.
Charism	A specific gift or grace of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefits the Church, given to help a person live out the Christian life, or to serve the common good in building up the Church.
Church	The people of God established by Christ through the Apostles. It bears the marks of being “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”
Concupiscence	The name given to the state which persists in human beings, even after Baptism, which produces an inclination to sin.
Conscience	The interior voice of a human being within whose heart God’s law is inscribed. To exercise conscience well means to be able to recall God’s law and then to judge how to act in a particular circumstance.
Consecrated	The state of being dedicated to Divine service. Can apply to a person or a thing.
Covenant	A solemn agreement between human beings or between God and a human being involving mutual commitments or guarantees. God’s relationship with human beings is marked by a number of covenants (e.g. with Noah, Abraham and Moses). With Christ a new and eternal covenant was established.
Dei Verbum	Literally meaning “Word of God” this is the teaching document of the Second Vatican Council that concerns Divine Revelation.
Deposit of Faith	The heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, handed on in the Church from the time of the Apostles, from which the teaching office of the Church draws all that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed.

Deus Caritas Est	Literally meaning “God is love” this was the title of the first encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI, published in 2005.
Dicastery	The name given to an administrative department in the Vatican with particular responsibilities. The Vatican’s governance is looked after by a number of “Dicasteries” which, at the administrative level, can be viewed as similar to government departments.
Divine Revelation	What has been revealed to us by God. It is passed on in the Church through Sacred Scripture and Tradition.
Dogma	Teaching defined by the Church which requires belief. Dogma is always contained in Divine Revelation or is necessarily derived from truths contained in Divine Revelation.
Doxology	A Christian prayer which gives praise and glory to God, often, in a particular way, to the three persons of the Trinity.
Eastern Church	Eastern Church in this document refers to the part of the Church that divided from the West in 1054, at the Great Schism. This is sometimes referred to as the Orthodox Church and is in fact made up of a number of individual “national” churches. Further there are “eastern churches” that are in union with Rome but do not share the Latin Rite. These include churches or other traditions such as Byzantine, Alexandrian, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite and Chaldean rites.
Easter tide	The period of time in the Liturgical Year of the Church that spans from Easter Sunday to Pentecost.
Ecumenical Council	A gathering of all the bishops of the world in exercise of their collegial authority over the universal Church.

Encyclical	A pastoral letter written by the Pope and sent to the whole Church and even to the whole world, to express Church teaching on some important matter.
Epiclesis	A prayer asking for the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. It is present in every Sacrament but is especially prominent during Mass when the priest asks God to send the Holy Spirit so that the offerings of the Eucharist may become the Body and Blood of Christ.
Episcopal Ordination	The ordination of a Bishop.
Eucharistic Prayer	Also known as the “canon” of the Mass or the “anaphora”. This is the central part of the Mass which contains the prayer of thanksgiving and the consecration.
Eucharistic Species	The bread and the wine which become the Body and Blood of Christ at the consecration during Mass.
Ex opere operato	Literally meaning “out of the work worked”, this expression is used to specify that the effectiveness of the sacraments does not depend on the worthiness or otherwise of the minister. Because the sacraments are the works of Christ, they are effective “out of the work worked”.
Fathers of the Church	The collective name for the most significant leaders of the Church in the generations and centuries after the Apostles (the “patristic era”). These “fathers” received the teachings of the Apostles into their own contexts and developed the collective understanding of them for the Church. They also oversaw the early Ecumenical Councils of the Church. Significant church fathers include St Ambrose of Milan, St Jerome, St Augustine of Hippo, St Gregory I, St Athanasius of Alexandria, St Gregory Nazianzus, St Basil of Caesarea and St John Chrysostom.

Gaudium et Spes	Literally meaning “joy and hope” this is the teaching document of the Second Vatican Council that concerns the Church in the modern world.
Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Traditionally the Church identifies 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord.
Gospel	The “Good News” of God’s mercy and love revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
Grace	The free and undeserved gift that God gives us to respond to our vocations to become his adopted children. Distinction should be made between sanctifying (habitual grace) and actual graces.
Habitual Grace	Also known as sanctifying grace, this is the stable and supernatural disposition that enables the soul to live with God and to act by his love. It is received as a gift by a Christian at Baptism.
Incarnation	The fact that the Son of God assumed human nature and became man in order to accomplish our salvation in that same human nature.
Institution Narrative	This refers to the part of the Mass, present in all Eucharistic Prayers of the Latin Rite, where the words of Jesus from the Last Supper are spoken by the priest. They are referred to as the “institution narrative” because the words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper instituted the priesthood and the Eucharist as the ongoing mode of thanksgiving, sacrifice and praise.
Laudato Si'	Literally meaning “may He be praised” this is the title of an encyclical letter written by Pope Francis in 2015 which teaches about the human condition from the starting point of the damage human activity has done to the environment. The title is based on a prayer of St Francis.



Lectio Divina	Literally meaning “Divine reading” this is a method of prayer based on careful reading and meditating on Sacred Scripture. It is often a central part of monastic life and can be adopted by all Christians as a method of prayer.
Liturgy of the Hours	Also known as the “Divine Office” this is the name given to the public prayer of the Church that divides the day by specific periods of prayer. All priests, religious and some lay people pray elements of the Liturgy of the Hours proper to their own vocation.
Logos	A Greek word meaning “Word” or “Order”. In the Christian context it refers to Christ as the “Word of God”. St John’s Gospel uses this word in the expression, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God...” (John 1:1) and “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14).
Lumen Gentium	Literally meaning “Light of the Nations” this is the teaching document of the Second Vatican Council which concerns the Church.
Magisterium	The teaching office of the Church.
Messiah	Literally meaning “anointed one”, can also be translated as ‘Christ’.
Miracles	A sign or wonder, such as a healing or the control of nature, which can only be attributed to Divine power. The miracles of Jesus were signs of the presence of God’s kingdom.
Monstrance	The liturgical ornament which houses the Blessed Sacrament for services such as Adoration, Benediction or Eucharistic Processions.
Natural Revelation	In contrast to Divine Revelation, this is the way that God reveals Himself to us in the world around us for example in the order that appears to exist in the universe, its predictability.

Nicene Creed	The profession of faith which came from the first two ecumenical councils (Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381).
Original Sin	The sin of the first human beings against God described, in figurative language, in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis. The term Original Sin also refers to the state that is passed on to every human being from which we are saved by Baptism into Christ.
Paschal Mystery	The work of Christ comprising principally his Passion, death, Resurrection and glorious Ascension. The Paschal Mystery is celebrated and made present in the Liturgy of the Church and its saving effects communicated through the Sacraments.
Private Revelations	Revelations made during the course of history which do not add to or form part of the deposit of faith, but rather help people live out their faith more fully. Some of these private revelations have been recognised by the Church but belief in them is not required.
Rerum Novarum	Literally meaning “Of New Things” is the title of an encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, written in 1891, which is the first exposition of what would become a body of Catholic Social Teaching built up in a series of encyclicals since.
Sacrosanctum Concilium	Literally meaning “Sacred Council” this is the teaching document of the Second Vatican Council on the Liturgy.
Salvation History	The story of God’s interaction with human history in order to save us.
Sanctifying grace	Also known as habitual grace, this is the stable and supernatural disposition that enables the soul to live with God and to act by his love. It is received as a gift by a Christian at Baptism.

Second Vatican Council	The Ecumenical Council opened in 1962 by Pope Saint John XXIII and closed in 1965 by Pope Saint Paul VI
Synoptic Gospels	The three Gospels written by Ss Mark, Matthew and Luke which follow a similar outline.
Tabernacle	The name given to the special receptacle in the church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.
The Fall	The term which refers to the “fall” of humanity from friendship with God recounted in the story of Adam and Eve. A prior “fall” of angels led to the emergence of Satan.
The Old Testament	The collection of books that tell the story of the people of Israel prior to the birth of Jesus. For Christians the term “Old” is used because it designates what comes before the New Testament. For the Jewish people, the same collection of books would simply be known as Scripture (Christians may also call them the “Hebrew Bible” or “First Testament”). Amongst Christians, there are differences in which books constitute the Old Testament based on which of the Wisdom and historical books are included. Catholic and Orthodox bibles include certain Wisdom and historical books that were part of Greek translations of Jewish Scripture whereas churches that emerged from the Reformation do not.
Theism	Belief in the existence of a Divine reality.
Theological Virtues	The virtues of faith, hope and charity called theological because they have God as their object. They are given to a person as a gift at Baptism
Torah	The first five books of the Old Testament. Often translated as “law” the word actually means more like “teaching”.

Transubstantiation	The name given to the process by which the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Christ during Mass. The word itself is not a defined dogma but the belief that the process takes place is.
Trinity	The mystery of one God in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Twelve Tribes of Israel	The people of God established through the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The twelve tribes are descended from Jacob's twelve sons.
Typology	A way of interpreting events and people in Salvation History as prefiguring a reality that comes later.
Viaticum	The name given to the Sacrament of Holy Communion when it is received at the end of life. From the Latin meaning "provision for the journey."
Vocation	From the Latin meaning "call" it refers to the call of God which shapes the life of a person.
Western Church	In contrast to the Eastern Church, the Western Church refers to that part of the Church that remained in union with Rome after the Great Schism of 1054.

## Certain Names Included in the Text

Moses	A biblical character used by God to lead the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness, towards the promised land. Moses himself died before entering the promised land and his successor, Joshua, crossed the Jordan with the people. Moses was given the Ten Commandments by God on Mount Sinai.
Pope Saint John Paul II	Pope from 1978 to 2005. Philosopher, theologian and prolific author of teaching documents which helped shape the Church in the decades after the Second Vatican Council. Known, in particular, for his teaching on moral theology, especially his series of catechesis known as the “Theology of the Body”, and the part he played in the opening up of communist Eastern Europe.
St Ambrose	St Ambrose of Milan was a fourth century bishop of Milan and father of the Church whose preaching influenced St Augustine. He is a doctor of the Church.
St Anselm	St Anselm of Canterbury was a Benedictine monk and Archbishop of Canterbury. He lived from 1033-1109 and wrote extensively on matters of theology and philosophy. He is perhaps most well known for his work on the satisfaction theory to explain the death of Christ known as “Atonement”. St Anselm is a doctor of the Church.

St Augustine	St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was a philosopher whose search for truth led him to become a Christian after the ardent prayers of his mother, St Monica. St Augustine's teaching has had a major influence on the Church, especially in the west, and his works include an autobiography, known as "Confessions", "The City of God" and works on the Trinity. He is a doctor of the Church.
St Irenaeus of Lyons	A second century father of the Church and martyr from Smyrna in modern day Turkey whose writings, especially his work "Against Heresies" helped to define orthodox Christian belief.
St John of the Cross	A sixteenth century saint from the Spanish mystical tradition. He was a Carmelite Friar whose works include "Ascent of Mount Carmel" and "The Dark Night of the Soul". St John is a doctor of the Church.
St John Vianney	Also known as the Curé d'Ars, St John Vianney lived from 1786 to 1859. Most of his priesthood was spent in the village of Ars, France, where he established a reputation for holiness and care for his people. He is the patron saint of parish priests.
St Justin Martyr	A second century father of the Church and martyr from Palestine whose writings attest to an early form of celebrating Mass and defend the life of Christian communities.
St Thomas Aquinas	A thirteenth century Italian philosopher and theologian whose writings helped to assimilate the works of Aristotle into Christian thinking. His many books, especially his "Summa Theologiae", continue to be very influential in the Church. He is a doctor of the Church.

## Reading and Resources

The following is intended as a selection of helpful resources, by no means comprehensive, but solid and trustworthy. Some of them are referred to in the text.

### **Books**

*Catechisms:*

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997).

*YOUCAT: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Catholic Truth Society, 2010).

*Credo: The Catholic Faith Explained*, Fr Marcus Holden and Fr Andrew Pincent (Catholic Truth Society, 2007).

*Other books:*

*Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Joseph Ratzinger (New York, 2007).

*Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Joseph Ratzinger (San Francisco, 2011).

*Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*: Joseph Ratzinger, (New York, 2012).

*Introduction to Christianity*, Joseph Ratzinger (San Francisco, 2000, orig. 1969).



*Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, Pope Francis in conversation with Austen Ivereigh (London, 2020).

*The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, Ronald Rolheiser (New York, 2014, orig. 1998).

*The Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*, Ronald Rolheiser (New York, 2014).

*The Sacramental Mystery*, Paul Haffner (Leominster, 2016).

*The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*, James Martin SJ (New York, 2010).

*Finding True Happiness: Satisfying Our Restless Hearts*, Robert Spitzer, SJ (San Francisco, 2015).

*The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, Jonathan Sacks (London, 2011).

*Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla (San Francisco, 1981, Polish orig. 1960).

*The Fulfilment of All Desire: A Guidebook for the Journey to God Based on the Wisdom of the Saints*, Ralph Martin (Steubenville, 2006)

*The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God: Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers are Considering Christianity Again*, Justin Brierley (Carol Stream, 2023)

*The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*,  
Francis Collins (London, 2007)

### ***Some Classic Spiritual Writings:***

St Benedict: *The Rule of St Benedict*

St Augustine: *Confessions*

St Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*

St Catherine of Siena: *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*

St Ignatius of Loyola: *Spiritual Exercises*

St Teresa of Avila: *Autobiography, The Way of Perfection, Interior Castle*

St John of the Cross: *Ascent of the Mount, Dark Night of the Soul, Spiritual Canticle*

St Francis de Sales: *Introduction to the Devout Life*

St Thérèse of Lisieux: *Story of a Soul*

Thomas Merton: *The Seven Storey Mountain*

### ***Websites:***

The Vatican: Access to official church documents including the Catechism of the Catholic Church, all the documents of the Second Vatican Council and Papal encyclicals:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>

Catechesis:

<https://www.sycamore.fm>

Resources of Bishop Robert Barron including access to the DVD series *Catholicism*:

<https://www.wordonfire.org>

Evangelisation and catechesis:  
<https://ascensionpress.com>

Author, teacher and evangelist:  
<https://www.scotthahn.com>

Answers to questions:  
<https://www.catholic.com>

### ***Podcasts:***

Bible in a Year Podcast:  
<https://bibleinayear.fireside.fm>

Podcast on the Liturgy:  
<https://www.liturgyguys.com>

Bishop Robert Barron's Weekly Sermons:  
<https://wordonfire.podbean.com>

Word on Fire Show:  
<https://www.wordonfireshow.com>

Dominican Sisters of St Joseph Weekly Gospel Study  
Podcast:  
<https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/sunday-gospel-podcasts-dominican-sisters-of-lXVkwZSGIFM/>

The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God:  
<https://justinbrierley.com/surprisingrebirth/>

### ***Apps:***

Daily Prayer App:  
<https://pray-as-you-go.org>

Download the Prayer of the Church:  
<https://universalis.com>

Bible App:  
<https://youversion.com/the-bible-app/>

Hallow App:  
<https://hallow.com/>