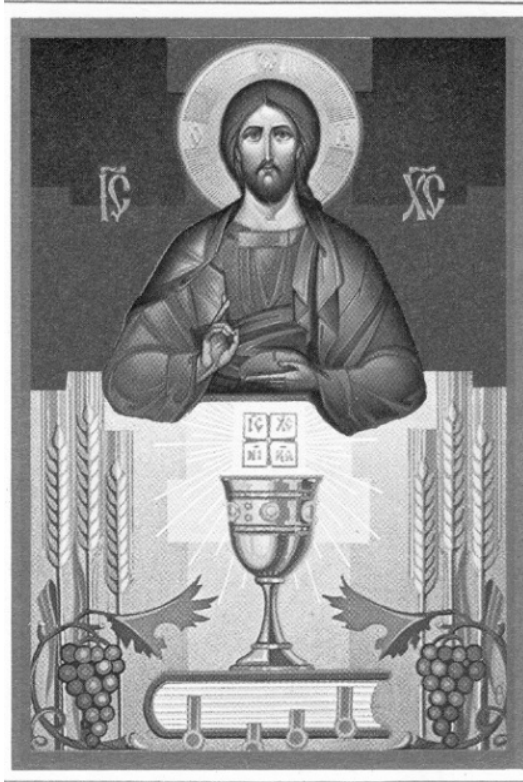


Practices, Prayer, Ritual, Liturgy, Sacraments and Theology in the Catholic Church

An Overview
By Marilyn Hughes

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!

<http://outofbodytravel.org>



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Having worked primarily in radio broadcasting, Marilynn Hughes spent several years as a news reporter, producer and anchor before deciding to stay at home with her three children. She's experienced, researched, written, and taught about out-of-body travel since 1987.

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- Journal Eighteen: SA'D UD DIN MAHMÜD SHABISTARĪ -Forgotten Islamic Sufi Mystic*
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Issue Seven – Sikh Mystical Theology, Conversations with Guru Nanak
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CONTENTS

The Early Church Fathers of the Catholic Church - 9
The Philokalia - 13
The Lost Books of the Bible - 17
Apostolic Canons - 20
The Holy Mass - 23
The Catholic Liturgy - 26
The Holy Catholic Triduum - 30
The Sacrament of Baptism - 33
The Sacrament of Confirmation - 36
The Sacrament of the Eucharist - 39
The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation - 43
The Sacrament of Matrimony - 45
The Sacrament of Holy Orders - 47
The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick - 49
Common Catholic Prayers - 51
The Holy Rosary - 55
The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy - 59
The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit - 62
What are the Cardinal Virtues - 65
What are the Theological Virtues - 68
What are Mortal and Venial Sin - 71

What is Moral Theology - 74
What is Mystical Theology - 77
What is Ascetical Theology - 80
What is Dogmatic Theology - 84
The Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory - 87

The Early Church Fathers of the Catholic Church

Ante-Nicene Fathers, Nicene Fathers, Post-Nicene
Fathers

Christian Tradition begins with the *Writings of the Early Church Fathers*, teachings of those taught directly by the apostles and in a line of succession beyond them.

Ante-Nicene Fathers, Teachings of the Apostolic Fathers and Martyriums

The *Writings of the Early Church Fathers* begin with a ten volume series of teachings given to the direct successors of the apostles of Jesus Christ. These are those who were taught directly by St. Peter, St. Paul, St. James and all of the twelve apostles. Some of the writers include Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Dionysius and Lactantius. They also contain some of the first liturgies of the Catholic Church, the Apostolic Teachings and Constitutions, Apocryphal Gospels and Acts and the works of the Twelve Patriarchs.

Martyriums

One of the most fascinating elements of the earliest writings of the church includes the introduction of

martyriums. The reader gets a fascinating look into the true life and death of the early church as the writings travel through the teachings of each successor in the line and then find themselves suddenly caught in a martyrdom, the story of how each and every one of them was martyred for the faith. The martyrdom became a tradition in the early church because almost all of the original teachers were killed for their beliefs in frankly heinous fashion.

The Blessed Virgin Mary

Coincidentally, the only known words written by the Blessed Virgin Mary are recorded in the Ante-Nicene Fathers in the form of a letter of encouragement to one of the Apostles.

The Pastor of Hermas

Another fascinating book recorded in the writings of the Early Church Fathers is the *Pastor of Hermas*. Very popular in the days of the early church, it was a surprise when it was taken from the canon of the bible by the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. Similar to the *Revelation of St. John*, the *Pastor of Hermas* is a book with many theories regarding its origin, wherein a man is taken into the heavens and shown the ravages and consequences of various sins. Powerful and sometimes frightening, the depictions of the heavenly and hellish realms could be compared to that of the Old Testament era *Book of Enoch*.

Nicene Fathers

The Nicene Fathers consist of all the writings of St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom which are extensive and consist of fourteen large volumes.

Post-Nicene Fathers

The Post-Nicene Fathers contain another large fourteen volumes beginning with the *Church History of Eusebius* and ending with the *Seven Ecumenical Councils*. Great writers of the church such as Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomenus, Athanasius, Jerome, Cyril, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen and Basil all contribute to these lengthy treatises, many of them church histories.

Philokalia

Another vein of writers from the early church exist which are lesser known but considered just as important as the Early Church Fathers by most Orthodox Christians. The writers of the *Philokalia* were the great Early Desert Fathers who retired into the desert to learn from the silence the truth of God within.

Perhaps with the combination of these treasures of history, you may get a truer and complete

understanding of the origins and original purpose of Christianity and Catholicism in particular.

The Philokalia

Writings of the Early Desert Fathers and the Jesus
Prayer Tradition

The Philokalia of Russian Orthodox tradition, was popularized by the book 'The Way of a Pilgrim,' and the Pilgrim Continues His Way.'

The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way

In '*The Way of a Pilgrim*,' and '*The Pilgrim Continues His Way*,' an older Russian Orthodox gentleman goes on a lengthy journey to seek to fulfill the gospel directive of St. Paul to "Pray Without Ceasing." He is led by a mysterious book he carries with him everywhere he goes entitled the *Philokalia*, which is a series of writings from the earliest of the desert fathers gleaned from the fruits of their profound ascetical lives in caves and other desert dwellings where they sought only the purification of their souls and knowledge of God.

Philokalia

In the *Philokalia*, we hear from a collection compiled by two great saints: St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth. Writers of the *Philokalia* follow a narrow and stringent path and include such great souls as St. Isaiah the Solitary, Evagrius the Solitary, St. John Cassian, St. Mark the

Ascetic, St. Hesychios the Priest, St. Neilos the Ascetic, St. Diadochos of Photiki, St. John of Karpathos, St. Theodorus the Great Ascetic, St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Thalassios the Libyan, St. John of Damaskos, Abba Philimon, St. Theognostos, St. Philotheos of Sinai, Ilias the Presbyter, Theophanis the Monk, St. Peter of Damaskos, St. Symeon Metaphrastis, St. Symeon the New Theologian, Nikitas Stithatos, Theoliptos Metropolitan of Philadelphia, Nikiphoros the Monk, St. Gregory of Sinai and St. Gregory Palamas.

Russian Orthodox Tradition of the Jesus Prayer

The Pilgrim discovers in the writings of the *Philokalia* the Russian Orthodox Tradition of the “Jesus Prayer,” which is considered the perfect prayer because it covers all important aspects of Christian Theology and if prayed continually throughout the day within the mind – during times of quiet and times of work – it fulfills the injunction of St. Paul to ‘Pray Without Ceasing.’

St. Gregory of Sinai emphasizes the importance of this prayer in saying “Faith, like active prayer, is a grace. For prayer, when activated by love through the power of the Spirit, renders true faith manifest.”

The Jesus Prayer

‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on me a Sinner.’ Why is this considered the perfect prayer?

Because it begins by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord, recognizing His position as the Son of God, and then asks for mercy while at the same time acknowledging that we are sinners. By praying this continually, you are sending the incense of prayer to heaven continually and are engaging in a practice not unlike a mantra in Eastern Traditions which had a part in inspiring the Jesus Prayer.

Yoga and the Jesus Prayer

In *'Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition,'* Bede Griffiths compares Symeon the New Theologian with the Yogis of Hinduism. "The language of the mystics is a 'raid on the ineffable,'" he says, "an attempt to communicate the incommunicable experience of their transformation in God."

Russian Orthodox Asceticism in the Philokalia

Although the Jesus Prayer Tradition is the most well-known aspect of the *Philokalia*, the majority of the texts are actually very profound ascetical treatises on the mysteries of the inner soul. Their self-examination and disciplinary practice go very deeply as demonstrated by Evagrius the Solitary when he says "Man cannot drive away impassioned thoughts unless he watches over his desire and incensive power. He destroys desire through fasting, vigils and sleeping on the ground, and he tames his incensive power through long-suffering, forbearance, forgiveness and acts of compassion."

The Early Church Fathers and the Desert Fathers

The Writings of the *Early Church Fathers* are much more widely known in the Christian World than the *Philokalia*, but it is interesting to note that the *Philokalia* bears as much significance and in many cases surprisingly more depth into the ascetical way. It seems that the *Writings of the Early Church Fathers* are incomplete without the *Philokalia*, and the writings of their brothers in faith, the Early Desert Fathers and Solitaries.

The Lost Books of the Bible

And the Forgotten Books of Eden

The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden are an unusual collection of non-canonical texts written regarding Biblical times.

The Gospel of the Birth of Mary

In *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary*, a detailed account of the birth of the virgin is presented which is very much in accord with the traditions held by the Catholic Church despite the absence of the gospel in the canonical texts. Born to elder parents who were barren throughout their marriage, Joachim and Anne receive similar visions from God that are presented to Joseph and Mary in the Gospels about the coming birth of their daughter. Pledged to the temple at a young age, she vows virginity, and was betrothed to Joseph after the men of the town were brought to the temple carrying their staffs. Joseph's rod, according to *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary*, sprouted a dove. Many legends say that the rod sprouted lilies or other flowers, but this particular gospel cites a dove. This was the sign that he was to marry the Blessed Virgin.

The ProtoEvangelion

The *ProtoEvangelion* is a much more detailed and historical account of the birth of Christ believed to have been written by James the Lesser, who was also the first Bishop of the Jerusalem Christian Community.

The Infancy Gospels

Perhaps the most interesting and talked about books in *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* are the *Infancy Gospels*. In the *Infancy Gospels*, Jesus Christ is portrayed in childhood as a rambunctious youth who sometimes uses his unusual gifts in unexpected ways, causing harm to other children who upset him, and in one instance, striking dead a teacher who treats him with disrespect.

Nicodemus

The writings of Nicodemus contain information of great interest as in the gospels there is only a small accounting of the meeting of Nicodemus, the unusually pious Pharisee who supports Jesus Christ throughout His trial, and Jesus. The books written by Nicodemus recount several miracles and events already related in the gospels, but he expands on these events and tells of several events unknown in any other text.

The Pastor of Hermas

An unusual text included in the collection of *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* which is also included in the Writings of the Early Church Fathers is entitled *The Pastor of Hermas*; a revelation not unlike the *Revelation of St. John*, which takes a mystical journey into the realms of good and evil and shows the punishment and rewards of various states of virtue and sin.

The Forgotten Books of Eden, Psalms of Solomon, Secrets of Enoch

Fascinating in content, *The Forgotten Books of Eden* tell a different story of *Genesis* which is lengthy and detailed wherein Adam and Eve immediately repent of their sin against God and work towards attaining repentance and forgiveness. God is described in these texts as “merciful and full of pity” when hearing the voices of Adam and Eve pleading for forgiveness. But Adam and Eve go through fifteen apparitions of Satan wherein they are tempted, and Satan expresses jealousy of the mercy of God displayed towards them. In subsequent generations, however, it is shown quickly how soon the descendants of Adam and Eve fall into sin very easily again making the time of Noah and the Ark inevitable.

Two other interesting texts in *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* include the *Psalms of Solomon* and the *Secrets of Enoch*, a journey into the

heavens, hells and valleys of the spiritual world as shown to 'the man who walked with God.'

Many of these books are considered invalid or heretical, but they remain as fascinating historical images of a time which holds the fascination of humanity.

Apostolic Canons

The Direct Teachings of the Twelve Apostles

The Apostolic Canons were a long considered a tradition of the church because they were dictated directly from the Twelve Apostles of Christ to the St. Clement of Rome.

The first of the Early Church Fathers, St. Clement of Rome is thought to have been a Roman Gentile. It was in Philippi that he met St Paul in A.D. 57 and became a minister to both the apostles and the early faithful of the church. St. Clement is believed to have received the Apostolic Canons directly from the twelve apostles and written them down for posterity's sake. He served as a co-presbyter aside the second and third popes', Pope Linus (Pope from 67-76-88 A.D.) and Pope Cletus (Pope from 76-88 A.D). , who succeeded St. Peter as first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church (Pope from 64 - 67 A.D).

Apostolic Constitutions

The Apostolic Canons can be found in the eighth book of the Apostolic Constitutions, the Seventh Volume of Ante-Nicene Fathers in the *Writings of the Early Church Fathers*. There are two different versions, a Latin version containing fifty and the other eighty-five actual Canons. In the Western Church, these first fifty are considered to be authoritative while in the

Eastern Church - including the Orthodoxies of Greece, Egypt and Russia - all eighty-five are considered to be official church teaching.

The Philokalia

Many people do not realize that the writings of the Early Church Fathers are not the only surviving compilation of written works from the time of the early church. *The Philokalia* contains the remaining writings of the Early Desert Fathers of the Church and is highly utilized in the Eastern Orthodox Traditions.

Apostolic Canons

Up until the sixteenth century, the Apostolic Canons were given great authority with such esteemed supporters as the Council of Ephesus, Theodosius and St. Justinian. St. John Damascene gave them equality in authority to that of the New Testament. But during the 16th century, they lost favor with many in the church after critical examination even though few debate the authenticity of the Canons. The debate concerns the place they should hold within the Church.

An ancient manuscript discovered in Constantinople, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, re-opened the debate in recent years although it did not contain an original copy of the Apostolic Canons but discussed them with great authority. The volume was published in 1883 and bears a great resemblance to the Apostolic

Canons themselves. The historicity of this codex seems to provide another source from the period which gives credibility to authenticate the original Canons.

Contents of the Apostolic Canons

Although seventy six out of the eighty Apostolic Canons contain exhortations to the clergy, their ordination and the proper exercise of their office, there are a few sections relating to the moral law as applied to laypersons. These Canons are listed under 'General Commandments' and include admonitions regarding covetousness, revenge, vanity, judgment, scriptural reading, the avoidance of non-authorized books, concerning bad women, subjection of wives to their husbands, modesty and others.

The Holy Mass

According to Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

According to Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, there are thirty steps in the practice of the Holy Mass.

In Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's time, Pre-Vatican II, he and Henri Daniel-Rops wrote a book called *This is the Mass* which outlined the liturgical celebration of the Holy Mass in great detail. Although some of the steps were altered during Vatican II, Bishop Sheen's recollection provides us with a good framework for understanding the Mass today, but also a record of how it was practiced in the Past. The one marked with an asterisk (*) is no longer practiced after Vatican II.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's Thirty Steps of the Holy Mass

- 1.) Introibo ad Altar Dei - Prayers at the Foot of the Alter
- 2.) Confiteor - General Confession of the Faithful
- 3.) The Kissing of the Altar - Priest Kisses the Altar
- 4.) The Mark of the Beginning - Making the Sign of the Cross
- 5.) The Mercy and the Glory of God - The Kyrie or Gloria
- 6.) Made One in the Lord - Prayer of the Collect and Old Testament Reading

- 7.) The Reading in God's Name - Reading of the Epistle
- 8.) An Interval of Preparation - Alleluia is Sung Before the Gospel
- 9.) The Word of God - Priest Reads the Gospel
- 10.) The Canon of Our Faith - Congregation Recites the Apostles Creed
- 11.) The Offertory - Prayers of the Faithful Given at the Time of the Church Offering
- 12.) By Bread and Wine - The Preparation of the Bread and Wine for Consecration
- 13.) With Clean Hands - Washing of the Hands of the Priest
- 14.) To the Three Divine Persons - Prayer to the Holy Trinity
- 15.) In Secret - Secret Prayers the Priest Prays at the Altar
- 16.) The Prologue to the Great Thanksgiving - The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer
- 17.) Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus - Now Known as the Holy, Holy, Holy a three-fold
acclamation to the all holy God
- 18.) The Church at the Foot of the Cross - A Remembrance of the Living
- 19.) This is My Body - Elevation of the Host
- 20.) This is My Blood - Elevation of the Chalice
- 21.) In Remembrance -The Supplices, A Remembrance of the Passion in Three Prayers
- 22.) Our Dead and We Sinners - The Commemoration of the Dead
- 23.) Thanksgiving - The Little Elevation
- 24.) The Pater Noster - The Lord's Prayer, Our Father

- 25.) The Broken Bread - The Breaking of the Host
- 26.) In the Blood of the Lamb - The Agnus Dei, Lord Have Mercy
- 27.) The Priest's Communion - The Priest Receives Holy Communion
- 28.) The Communion of the People - Congregation Approaches the Holy Table
- 29.) In the Hand of God - Blessing and Thanks be to God
- 30.) In the Glory of the Word - The Last Gospel*

Changes of Vatican II to the Holy Mass

The primary changes of Vatican II to the Holy Mass involved the priest facing the congregation rather than the altar and allowing priests to celebrate the Holy Mass in their native tongue rather than only in Latin. This was to help the faithful to understand what was happening at each stage of the Mass in order to help them participate with more conscious knowledge of the sacrament. Currently, Masses can be celebrated in either Latin or the native tongue.

The Catholic Liturgy

The Exposition and Understanding of the Word

Liturgy in Catholicism literally translates into 'The Meaning of the Word.'

The word 'Liturgy' originally came from several words utilized in the Hebrew service of God in the sanctuary of the temple and a Greek word meaning 'public service' which usually referred to the discharge of a religious service which was performed after a payment by the rich citizens of Athens.

Liturgy in Catholicism

The Greek word for such service is found nowhere in the *New Testament*, but words indicating the performance of services performed by the Christian Clergy are indicated in the *Book of Acts*. Acts 13:2 states in English "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted" and has been regarded by scholars as first references to acts of worship and preaching by the prophets and teachers of the faith to come.

The Liturgy of the Word

Liturgy means 'The Meaning of the Word' in part because if you attend Holy Mass daily for three years, you will hear the entirety of the Old and New Testament Scripture read, and these readings of

scripture are considered to be the integral part of Liturgy. In the Liturgy of the Word an Old Testament Scripture is read, a New Testament Scripture (but not a Gospel) is read, i.e. from the letters, etc., and then the priest will read the Gospel reading for that day's liturgical celebration.

Other Parts of the Modern Liturgy

The Holy Mass begins with a procession carrying the holy Gospels to the altar. The Liturgy of the Word, previously described, then follows. After the Gospel reading, the priest will present a homily which is very much like a sermon, or a 'reflection' on the readings of the day. In Latin, this portion of the Holy Mass is considered the 'Missa Catechumenorum' and 'Missa Fidelium.'

A prayer for penitents usually follows and then the altar is covered with cloths. The priest's hands are washed, the hosts and chalice containing wine are presented while the priest follows with a series of consecratory prayers which altogether are known as the Eucharistic Prayer.

Bishop Fulton Sheen helped write a book with Henri Daniel-Rops of *Thirty Steps in the Holy Mass* before Vatican II.

When Liturgy was Recognized

It wasn't actually until the 4th century A.D. that the word Liturgy became utilized and recognized as the official term for the services of the church. This was done in the Council Ancrya in 314 A.D., shortly before the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. which defined many of the doctrines of the church. In the 6th century, the word Liturgy became officially recognized to deem any solemn service of the Universal Church including the Holy Mass, Evening Prayer, Baptisms, Confirmation, Ordinations, etc. But over the many centuries since, the Liturgy has been associated primarily with the Eucharistic Celebration of the Holy Mass.

Different Forms of Liturgy

Adopted by the Greek and Eastern Orthodox Churches, it is referred to as the 'Divine Liturgy'. In the Latin Liturgy, it is referred to as the 'Holy Mass.' And the term of liturgy in modern day refers to any celebration of the Eucharistic in the world in any language.

Early Church Fathers Usage of the Word Liturgy

In the *Writings of the Early Church Fathers*, common wording used for the sacrifice of the Holy Mass were 'sacrifice,' 'offering' and 'bloodless and rational sacrifice.' It was St. Ambrose who first used the word 'Mass.'

It is only from the year 150 A.D. and onward that we have specific and proven documentation of how the Holy Mass was celebrated. There is no documentation to show how the actual Apostles of the Lord celebrated this sacred ritual in their own time. In the documentation from 15 A.D. onward, we see that the Holy Mass was given very early on the designation of the most holy and greatest of all sacraments.

In the beginning, the Mass was only said by bishops. Priests were only allowed to say Mass in the absence of a bishop, but that changed shortly around 138 A.D. as the first *Apology* was written to make the celebration of the Mass Universal around the world in Latin.

The Holy Catholic Triduum

The Highest Feast Days of the Year

Easter, for Catholics, begins on Ash Wednesday. Forty days before the blessed event, Catholics begin praying and fasting like Jesus did.

Ash Wednesday is the solemn celebration which opens the season of Lent. The ashes are gathered from previously used palms in years past and burned. During the Mass, the parishioners receive the sign of the cross in ash - which represents very simply "From dust I have come, to dust I shall return." It is a remembrance of our mortality.

But it is on Palm Sunday that Easter Week begins, the day when Jesus Christ rode triumphantly into Jerusalem hailed as a king while the people were showering him with palms. Within a week, however, He would face his own cruel torture and death at the hands of the executioners on a cross. The Holy Triduum consists of the three days, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday which precede Easter.

Holy Thursday

The Mass of the Last Supper is a solemn celebration of the institution of the Eucharist. But this day is special in many ways. The Holy Oils which will be used the following year in the consecration of baptism, confirmation and the healing oils of the sick are brought back from the Diocese where they had been blessed by the Bishop in the Holy Chrism Mass. Parishioners process into the church with each of the oils and place them reverentially in their sacred vestibules.

Later in the service, the priest has twelve members of the parish who come to represent the twelve disciples and he washes their feet. Holy Thursday's primary importance, however, is that this is the day the Eucharist was made.

Good Friday

On Good Friday, the day commemorating the day of Jesus Christ's death, Catholics will proceed to venerate the Cross itself. In most churches, the priest or another strong young man will carry a large reproduction of the cross into the church which is placed before the altar. A short homily is given and then each person and family approaches to venerate the cross with kisses, hugs, a moment of silence or whatever the personal devotion may be.

Good Friday is unique of all days in the liturgical year in that the Blessed Sacrament is NOT present in the church. It is removed and taken to an adoration chapel to be used on the following Holy Saturday. Holy Communion is not received on Good Friday, because according to Catholic tradition, Christ has died and is not present in the Eucharist yet. This is also the reason the Eucharist is removed and taken out of the church. It represents the empty church, because Christ has died.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday begins with the blessing of a candle and usually the lighting of candles within the entire church. Every member of the church holds a candle and the fire is spread amongst the congregation. A great deal of scripture is then read, also known as, the twelve prophecies. Catholics read through twelve scriptural prophecies regarding the coming of Christ beginning in the Book of Genesis.

After the service, the congregation processes outside to another chapel where the Blessed Sacrament has been taken. In most churches, they will build a small adoration chapel which represents the cave where Jesus lay in wait of the resurrection. Catholics will sit and wait with Jesus, taking the time to pray with Him, engage in spiritual reading, but primarily to 'stay awake with him' and stand and watch. These services can go on all night or just up until about midnight depending on the location of the church.

The Sacrament of Baptism

The Liturgical Action of Christian Initiation

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole of Christian Life.

Baptism is a visible sign of the New Covenant between God and His people. It marks the predilection of the believer in choosing to walk with faith in their lives and to serve God. At the heart of every baptism is a solemn vow to service, charity in the life of the believer.

Elements of the Sacrament of Baptism

Christian Initiation occurs in stages and can occur very slowly or very quickly depending on the circumstances. However the timing is laid out in individual cases, they will all include proclamation of the word, acceptance of the gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and admission to Eucharistic communion.

In the Catholic Church, infants are baptized to remove the stain of original sin. But adults or older youth can undergo Christian Initiation and attend RCIA – the Rite of Christian Initiation which consist of classes which teach the faith so the potential

converts may make an educated decision about becoming Catholic.

Baptism is performed through the sprinkling of water while the words of the sacrament are performed by a priest.

The Symbolic Meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism in water represents the washing away of sins. The water is always a symbol of purification, but also representative of the spirit coming upon into the heart of a believer.

Those who die for the faith before receiving official Baptism are considered to have been baptized by the blood. And those who have the sincere intention of receiving Baptism but die before it is attained are said to be baptized by their intent.

Emergency Baptism when a Person is in Danger of Death

In the case of a person near death, any baptized person may perform a baptism on the spot to insure the absolution of the soul and a safe journey through death. The formula can be done with or without holy water, depending on the circumstances and is as follows: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Hospital Personnel, Police Officers, Emergency Workers and others perform Baptisms when someone who is near death asks for it in their moment of need and often do so without water.

Scriptural Basis for the Sacrament of Baptism

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” *Matthew 28:19-20*

There are a total of Seven Sacraments in the Catholic Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

The Liturgical Conferring of the Holy Spirit

The Sacrament of Confirmation fills the Baptized soul with the life of the Holy Spirit.

There had been little public pronouncement of the Sacrament of Confirmation until it was most clearly explained in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Declaring the Sacrament of Confirmation 'A True and Proper Sacrament,' the Council of Trent was the first to comment on it and place it among the seven sacraments of the law.

The Council of Florence in 1439 described the Sacrament of Confirmation as the giving of the Holy Spirit to the believer so that he may boldly walk forth in faith and proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Eastern and Western Forms of the Sacrament of Confirmation

In the Eastern Orthodox traditions, the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are usually celebrated at the same time. As a result, most babies are baptized and then confirmed immediately thereafter. The Baptism would be performed with the sprinkling of

water and then the special Chrism oils applied with the laying on of hands.

In the Roman Catholic traditions, infants are usually only baptized. Confirmation comes later between the ages of 12 and 18 depending on the diocese. Again, the Holy Spirit is called down upon the candidate for the Sacrament of Confirmation with the laying on of hands and the oil of Chrism usually performed by the bishop. Priests in the Roman tradition have to have special permission from the bishop to perform a Confirmation.

The Holy Chrism Oils

Chrism oils are consecrated yearly in what is called a Chrism Mass. This Mass is held about a week before the Holy Triduum, the week of Easter. During this Holy Mass, the bishop of each diocese blesses the oils which will be used all year long throughout the parishes for baptism, confirmation and the anointing of the sick. These oils are then brought into the church in a special celebratory Mass in each parish usually the week before the Holy Triduum.

Scriptural Basis for the Sacrament of Confirmation

“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only

been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." *Acts: 8:14-17*

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

The Liturgy and the Holy Mass

The Holy Mass and the celebration of the Eucharist are the height and summit of Catholic worship.

The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is described as a mystery of faith and love by theologians. Catholics believe in transubstantiation, which means that the bread and wine offered in the Holy Mass as the body and the blood of Jesus Christ is truly Christ's body and blood.

It is not a symbol, and it is not simply a memorial of Christ's sacrifice, but rather a non-bloody re-enactment of it. Many Eucharistic Miracles have been reported over the centuries wherein the sacred host begins to drip human blood at the moment of consecration. This has been taken by many believers as a miraculous sign of the actual Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

The Eucharist as the Sole Summit of the Christian Life

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that all other sacraments are inextricably bound to the Holy Mass, the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The lifeblood of every Catholic believer lies in the understanding and

reception of the Holy Eucharist, because Catholics believe that they are receiving the actual and true body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Mass and the Sacrament of the Eucharist is a sacrament of thanks and praise for the sacrifice made by Christ at Calvary. In addition to this purpose and function, the Holy Mass is always offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead.

Catholics usually offer the Mass for specific intentions, for those who have died or for the healing of a particular person who has become ill.

The Universality of the Holy Mass and Sacrament of the Eucharist

In the spirit of unity, the Church celebrated the Holy Mass in every church in the world in the original Latin. This meant that the Liturgy of the Mass was the same in every part of the world on any given day.

After Vatican II, the Catholic Church made it lawful to celebrate the Holy Mass in the native tongue of every country. However, the Liturgy of the Mass - the scriptural readings, the prayers of the faithful - remains the same in every Holy Mass on any given day in every corner of the world.

Catholic means 'Universal,' and the worship of the church remains universal through the Liturgy which is the same anywhere you may go in the world.

Scriptural Basis for the Sacrament of the Eucharist

“Jesus said: ‘I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; . . . he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and . . . abides in me, and I in him.’ *John 6:51, 54, 56*”

Catholics believe this scripture literally, not figuratively or symbolically like most Protestant Denominations.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

The Liturgical Action of Forgiveness

The confession of sin to a priest is an essential part and parcel of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

The Council of Trent defined the practice of Confession (Penance and Reconciliation) and said it was a true sacrament and that the Church had the authority to grant the grace of forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The faithful are called to make up, in a sense, for what they have done and this is the portion of Confession known as Penance. Priests in confession will grant absolution, which is forgiveness from sin, in the confessional. But they will usually then ask that the penitent pray certain prayers or do certain good deeds to atone for their sins.

The Sacrament of Conversion

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is the Sacrament of Conversion because it makes Jesus Christ present through the person of the priest. In effect, when the priest listens to the penitents sins and asks for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit works through the priest to make Christ present in the Sacrament.

It is said that many graces are received when you receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Exorcists

state that going to Confession is one of the most powerful weapons against the enemy of our souls.

The Catholic Church states and professes that special graces are received during this sacrament. It is practiced by the penitent entering the confessional, stating how long it has been since their last confession, reciting the prayer “Forgive me Father, for I have sinned,” and stating those things which are upon their conscience.

After this the priest will often discuss them with the penitent, give some helpful guidance and then the prayer of absolution will be done while the priest holds his hands over the penitent. A penance of prayer or works of mercy may then be asked, as well. s

Scriptural Basis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week,’ Jesus showed himself to his apostles. ‘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.’ *John 20:19, 22-23*

The Sacrament of Matrimony

The Liturgical Action of Marriage and Marital Union

Matrimony is considered as a covenant in Catholicism meant to better the two spouses in a partnership which lasts for life.

Men and women have been urged to live a life of charity and love with one another. Because marriage was a covenant from the start, marriage had to center around mutual trust, commitment to God and God's fidelity.

The covenant of Marriage brought forth the full purifying force which allowed for the Christian ideal of marriage to manifest. Because Christian Marriage was covenantal, that made it different from any other marriage in any other tradition or faith.

Sacramental Marriage as a Liturgical Act

In Catholicism, there is preparation for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony because marriage is a liturgical act and places upon both parties an ecclesial order. This means that husband and wife have certain rights and duties which pertain to one another and the raising up of children.

Catholicism believes that the marriage covenant between a man and woman form an intimate union of life and love which has been preordained by God. Unity, indissolubility and openness to life are very important aspects of this covenant.

Every married couple joins what is called the priesthood of the baptized, because the family home becomes a domestic church. The children who come from matrimonial union will learn first about their faith in the home and this is a vital school of human virtues which every married couple with children must be willing to create in order to fulfill this sacrament fully.

Scriptural Basis for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church . . . This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church.” *Ephesians 5:25, 32*

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

The Liturgical Action of Ordination

The Sacrament of Holy Orders commences in an Ordination, a ritual ceremony wherein a man takes the vows of obedience to his bishop and becomes a priest.

The Church has maintained the priesthood since the time of the Apostles. As the Apostles went and taught the people, they also taught the tradition of ordaining those to stand in the presence of the priest for the parishes and communities they left behind.

The priesthood remains today as a sign of Christ in the World. A priest stands in the person of Christ, according to Catholic Theology, in the performance of the sacraments of the Church.

The Unique Character of Ordination

The Catholic Church upholds the fact that we are all members of the priesthood of the faithful. But when a man feels called to become a priest, he is entering into a designated civil body in the Church known as ‘orders.’

Holy Orders are established and exercised in three degrees. Those are Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons. Bishops and Presbyters may not marry and must make a vow of celibacy, but Deacons may be married family men.

Another interesting point is that many priests who join specific Religious Orders will take a vow of poverty, but most Diocesan Priests do not take this vow.

Most priests will complete about nine years of education before becoming Ordained. They will be Ordained in steps as they pass through different phases of their education.

Scriptural Basis of the Sacrament of Holy Orders

“That is why I left you in Crete, that you amend what was defective, and appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you.” *Titus 1:5*

Words of the Holy Cure of Ars on the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the Priesthood

“The priest continues the work of redemption on earth . . . If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of fright but of love . . . The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.” *St. Jean Marie Vianney*

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

The Liturgical Action of Healing

Baptism is also known as the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

The grace set forth before those who are ill in the Anointing of the Sick is meant to give the suffering faithful the strength to endure the illness and/or recover. For those preparing for death, the Anointing of the Sick allows for final Confession and grants the soul grace to make their final journey crossing the divide between life and death.

The primary importance of the Anointing of the Sick is to comfort and strengthen those in the midst of serious illness, preparing for a surgical procedure or death. It arouses in the believer a confidence in the Divine Mercy.

The Special Graces Given through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick carries with it five very important effects. Among these are according to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

1. Uniting the Sick Person to the Passion of Christ
2. The strength, peace and courage to endure
3. The forgiveness of sins
4. The restoration of health if it be God's will
5. The preparation to pass into eternal life

The priest will use oils and the laying on of hands while reciting the formulaic prayers of the church.

Scriptural Basis of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over 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*

Common Catholic Prayers

That are Used in Most Catholic Devotions

The Apostles Creed; Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory Be; Hail, Holy Queen; Prayer after the Rosary.

In the Catholic tradition, there are many forms of prayer including mental prayer, contemplative prayer and recitations. Many of the Catholic Devotionals and Recitation prayers including The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy include a series of prayers that most Catholics know by heart. In order to make these devotions more understandable, here is a listing of the most common Catholic recitation prayers.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He arose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
Whence He shall 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 Our Father

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.

The 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 death.

Amen.

The 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.

The Hail, Holy Queen

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
 our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope.
 To Thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
 To Thee do we send up our sighs mourning
 and weeping in this valley of tears.
 Turn then, most gracious Advocate,
 Thine Eyes of Mercy toward us,
 and after this our exile show us the
 Blessed Fruit of thy Womb, Jesus.
 O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.
 Pray for us O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Prayer after the Rosary

O God, whose only begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal salvation. Grant, we beseech Thee, that while meditating on these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that we may both imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Holy Rosary

The Origin and Method of the Devotion

The Holy Rosary was originally given to the church in the year 1214 A.D., but it was in 2002 that they assumed their complete new form under Pope John Paul II.

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a Catholic Devotional Prayer which was given to St. Dominic by the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1214 A.D. The original Rosary consisted of three series of five meditations upon the life of Christ. The three series included the Joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries and the Glorious Mysteries. In 2002, Pope John Paul II, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit instituted a fourth series known as the Luminous Mysteries.

The Mysteries of the Rosary

The Joyful Mysteries consist of the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation of Jesus in the temple, and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple. The Sorrowful Mysteries consist of the Agony in the Garden, Scourging at the Pillar, Crowning with Thorns, Carrying of the Cross and the Crucifixion. The Glorious Mysteries consist of the Resurrection, Ascension, Descension of the Holy Spirit, Assumption of Mary and the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin

Mary. And the Luminous Mysteries consist of the Baptism of Jesus, the Wedding at Cana, Jesus Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, Transfiguration and the Institution of the Eucharist.

How to Pray the Rosary

The Rosary begins with Common Prayers of the Church; the recitation of the 'Apostles Creed,' the 'Our Father,' three 'Hail Mary's' and a 'Glory Be.' These prayers can be found in pamphlets like *Pray the Rosary*. Then the prayer proceeds to the set of five Mysteries attributed to the day of the week. **The Joyful Mysteries** are traditionally prayed on Mondays, Saturdays, All Sundays in Advent and the Epiphany during Lent. **The Sorrowful Mysteries** are traditionally prayed on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays during Lent. **The Glorious Mysteries** are traditionally prayed on Wednesday and Sundays during Easter and Advent. And the **Luminous Mysteries** are traditionally prayed on Thursdays.

With each set of five mysteries, the prayer begins with an 'Our Father' and a meditation upon the particular mystery in the life of Our Lord. Ten 'Hail Mary's' are then prayed while continuing to contemplate these mysteries and it is finalized with a 'Glory Be' and the prayer added by the Blessed Virgin at Fatima which is as follows: "Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Thy Mercy." After all five mysteries of a given day are prayed and

meditated upon, the 'Hail, Holy Queen' is recited followed by the 'Prayer after the Rosary.'

The Story of the Rosary's Birth

St. Dominic received the devotion of the Rosary in 1214 when he went into the forest in Toulouse to pray without stopping for three days and nights. According to accounts given in *De Dignitate Psalterii*, by Blessed Alan de al Roche, he cried and engaged in difficult penances to the point of falling unconscious.

In a vision, St. Dominic saw the Blessed Virgin surrounded by angels who said to him, "Dear Dominic, do you know which weapon the Blessed Trinity wants to use to reform the world?" Saint Dominic, entranced by the vision before him conceded that only she could possibly know. The Blessed Virgin then replied, "I want you to know that, in this kind of warfare, the battering ram has always been the Angelic Psalter which is the foundation stone of the New Testament. Therefore if you want to reach those hardened souls and win them over to God, preach my psalter."

History records that, at this moment, St. Dominic arose to preach this prayer to the people and the as he began to speak the earth shook, the sun became dark and thunder and lightning flashed continuously. The people reported seeing an apparition of the Blessed Virgin who raised her arms to heaven three times to call down the vengeance of God if they chose not to

listen to sermon of St. Dominic and receive the conversion he promised. It was at St. Dominic's prayer that the storms ceased and most of the people in Toulouse were converted and became profoundly devoted to the Holy Rosary.

The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy

St. Faustina Kowalska and her Legacy of Jesus Christ's Mercy

St. Faustina Kowalska, an obscure Polish nun who died in the late 1930's of Tuberculosis, was the herald of the New Catholic Devotion to the Divine Mercy.

The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy

The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy is a unique devotion prayed on regular rosary beads which was given to a young and very unobtrusive Polish Nun in the early 20th Century through visions she experienced of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praying the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy

The actual devotion is very simple. You begin with the Sign of the Cross, Pray an 'Our Father,'* 'The Hail Mary,*' and the Apostle's Creed,* and then on the 'Our Father' beads, you pray: "Eternal Father, I offer you the body, blood, soul and divinity of your dearly beloved son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world." On the 'Hail Mary' beads, you pray: "For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world. On the final three beads, you pray "Holy God, Holy

Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

Promises Given to St. Faustina about the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy by Jesus Christ

Jesus promised St. Faustina that all who prayed the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy for the dying would insure their immediate entry into heaven and complete eradication of all need of purgatory.

The Conversion Prayer of the Divine Mercy

St. Faustina was also told by Jesus Christ that if you prayed the conversion prayer for any soul (*Oh, blood and water, which gushed forth from the heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You.*) that he would guarantee their conversion. And if their heart was too hard for conversion, he would guarantee the conversion of another soul in their place.

Divine Mercy Sunday and the 3:00 Devotional Hour

The Chaplet of Divine Mercy has been put to music in two formats; a Gregorian Chant and in Song. Pope John Paul II canonized Sister Faustina as a saint and established 'Divine Mercy Sunday,' which is celebrated one week after Easter. On Divine Mercy Sunday, the Lord promised that those who went to confession and received communion would receive baptismal purity. Many people pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at 3:00 P.M., which is called the hour of

mercy because it was the hour in which Jesus died on the cross.

*The Our Father - 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.

*The Hail Mary - Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst 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.

*The Apostles Creed - I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord. Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Spiritual Bestowals of Confirmation

According to Catholic teaching, there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which descend upon believers at the time of their confirmation.

The Apostles discovered the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost when 'tongues of fire' descended from heaven and entered into each one of them giving them the ability to speak and understand the Gospel in every language.

What are the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit?

According to Catholic Theology, the seven gifts include the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of strength, the spirit of knowledge, the spirit of piety and the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, defined them originally by utilizing a verse from Isaiah 11:2 where it is said that there are seven gifts of the spirit which would rest upon the messiah, and these seven are then laid out.

Most of the Early Church Fathers also explained and defined the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, but they did so from following the Vulgate or Latin translation of the bible.

St. Thomas Aquinas also stated that even those who had perfected themselves in the moral life by practicing the Cardinal and Theological Virtues must be led by the promptings of the Holy Spirit in order to make it possible for them to follow the leading of God in their lives, but most especially in the moral order.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that charisms should be received gratefully by not only the person who receives it but every one of the faithful who benefits from the rich grace and apostolic vitality which such genuine gifts of the holy spirit bring into the Church. "What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the church." *Ephesians, 5: 31-23*

The Liturgy and Tradition of Pentecost

In the Liturgy of the Church for Pentecost, it is stated that the gifts are not singular actions or passing movements of grace. Rather, they are qualities or 'infused dispositions' in the believer which make them docile to the inspiration of the divine.

The Liturgy of Pentecost reflects the prayer of the Holy Spirit that Catholics often pray: "Come, O Holy Ghost, and send from heaven a ray of Thy light. Come, father of the poor. Come, Giver of graces. Come, Light of hearts, excellent Counselor, sweet Guest of our soul, sweet Refreshment, Rest in labor, Coolness in heat, Comfort in tears."

Or in the Latin Rite:

"Veni sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte coelitus
Lucis tuae radium"

What are the Cardinal Virtues?

The Science of Moral Action

It was St. Ambrose who first defined the four cardinal virtues.

St. Thomas says that the four cardinal virtues are so named because of their generality and importance in the life of moral action. They consist of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

The Moral Action of the Four Cardinal Virtues

According to *The Catholic Dictionary*, By William Addis and Thomas Arnold M.A. "Prudence enables us to know what to desire or avoid; justice gives everyone his due; fortitude urges us on when difficulty stands in the way of our duty; temperance restrains us when passion excites us to what is wrong."

All moral virtues can be found under one of the headings of the four cardinal virtues. Religion is placed under justice because it is, in essence, giving God His due. Chastity, on the other hand, is placed under temperance because it restrains the interior and exterior expression of the passions.

The cardinal virtues are sometimes referred to as the acquired moral virtues and were thus defined because they can exist in a soul regardless of the actions of grace. With grace, spirituality and religion absent, a person can have these virtues simply by the nature of choice and of being human.

In Catholic Theology, however, these cardinal virtues are sub-classed under two headings; acquired and infused.

According to *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, By Father Reginald Garrigou Lagrange, "The acquired moral virtues, as their name indicates, are acquired by the repetition of acts under the direction of more or less cultivated reason. The infused moral virtues are called infused because God alone can produce them in us."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church lays out and defines Christian Morality in depth under the section entitled 'Life in Christ.' It states that the morality of actions chosen by human beings depend upon three circumstances; the object chosen, the end in view or intention of the action and finally the circumstances surrounding the action.

Catholicism teaches that the moral law is written on the heart of every man, and every human being has within him an internal barometer or knowledge of that which is good and evil. Beyond this, it is the obligation of every Catholic Christian to form a good

conscience by learning the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church which is so well outlined in the *Catechism* for the modern day.

What are the Theological Virtues?

The Virtues which Relate Directly to God

There are three Theological Virtues and Four Cardinal Virtues in the Catholic Church.

Faith, Hope and Love are referred to in Catholic Theology as the Theological Virtues because they have as their end God alone. The Cardinal Virtues concern themselves with human duty in moral judgment.

Because it is God whom Catholics believe in, who Christians hope for and whom believers seek to love: faith, hope and love are considered supernatural virtues because they reach beyond the natural aim and end of man requiring believers to reach into a supernatural understanding.

The Infusion of Faith, Hope and Love

The infusion of faith helps Catholics to believe all that revelation has revealed. Without infused faith, the soul cannot have a true faith in that which is not seen although it has been seen by other believers. In *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Father Reginald Garrigou Lagrange says, "Infused faith is like a higher sense of

hearing for the audition of a spiritual symphony which has God for its composer."

The Infusion of an Intimate and Superhuman Light

Without the infusion of this grace, an intellectual human being can study the scriptures and other revelatory materials and still not come to a firm conclusion of faith or belief. You can believe in revelation only after it has been infused supernaturally into the soul.

Other theologians have described it as an infusion of an intimate and superhuman light, because the object of faith goes well beyond faith and reason which is theologically natural and rational. But faith is a supernatural and transluminous phenomenon.

The Supernatural Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity

In Catholic Theology, the other two supernatural virtues of hope and charity are compared to two wings. With hope supernaturally infused within the believer, Catholics desire to attain to God. This is not a natural state, but a supernatural one. Christians must rely on God to infuse this desire within, as it is only He who comes to help those who ask for spiritual help.

In *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Father Reginald Garrigou Lagrange says, "Charity is a superior and more disinterested love of God." The supernatural

and theological virtue of charity makes believers love God not for themselves, but for Himself - because of His infinite goodness. Charity makes believers love God as a friend, and it is by this charity that Christians may receive sanctifying grace to avoid the commission of mortal sins.

In Catholicism, there are venial and mortal sins. Venial sins are defined as sins which do not break the charity between God and the soul, whereas, mortal sins are serious and do separate the soul from the charity of God.

The Cardinal Virtues carry a great deal of importance in this discussion, as well as, Moral Theology, Mystical Theology and Ascetical Theology.

What are Venial and Mortal Sin?

The Catholic Measure of the Seriousness of Sin

Venial and Mortal Sin are measures of the seriousness of the fault against God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines sin as “an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods.”

But in the Catholic faith there are two measures of sin which determine its severity. A venial sin is considered a lesser offense which requires only personal confession between the penitent and God. Whereas mortal sin is sin of a grave matter with certain conditions fulfilled which require confession with a priest.

Although this is true, Catholics are encouraged to go to confession often even if they only have venial sins to help keep the conscience strong and the propensity for unintentional offenses lower. Catholic Moral Theology teaches that regular confession gives believers grace to recognize faults with greater ease and become more likely to avoid occasions of sin.

What Determines a Venial Sin?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that sin and virtue are compared to the works of the flesh and the works of the spirit. The works of the flesh are considered obvious and include “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like.” *Galatians 5:19-21*

Venial Sin is of a less serious nature than mortal and its conditions can be met when someone doesn't observe the standard of moral law, but the matter or intent is not of a serious nature.

However, even venial sin weakens charity in the Christian and creates a disordered attraction for worldly pleasures. This then slows the believer's progress in the attainment of virtue and in the practice of what is called moral good.

This is why even venial sin must be considered and confessed in prayer and the Sacrament of Penance in order to prevent the Catholic from becoming more prone to more serious occasions of sin.

What Determines a Mortal Sin?

According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a sin can only be mortal when three conditions are met. Those conditions cannot be met unless they involve grave matter, committed with full knowledge of the

gravity of the matter and what is termed deliberate consent.

Grave matter can be defined by inquiring into the Ten Commandments with the prohibitions including that of murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, defrauding another and the dishonoring of mother and father.

In Catholic Moral Theology, unintentional ignorance diminishes the fault but the Magisterium teaches that the moral law is written in the conscience of every human being.

Although for an act to be deemed mortal, it requires full knowledge, complete consent and it presupposes knowledge of the sin before its commission.

The practice of the virtues is necessary in learning to avoid venial and mortal sin. The virtues are broken down into the Cardinal Virtues and the Theological Virtues. These are discussed in great detail in Moral Theology.

What is Moral Theology?

Moral Teachings in the Catholic Church

There are two areas of science regarding morality in Catholicism: moral philosophy and moral theology.

Moral Theology is simply defined as the laws which regulate duty and determines the moral character of human activity by their conformity to three things: the natural standard of ethics, Christian Revelation and the positive laws of the Catholic Church.

Moral Philosophy, on the other hand, is more generally defined as related to the study of ethics and concerns itself with the ideals of that which is right and wrong as can be discovered from the lights of nature alone.

The Three Classifications of Moral Theology

In the classic work *Moral Theology*, By Rev. Heribert Jone and Rev. Urban Adelman, Moral Theology is defined as seeking the supernatural final end of every human being by engaging in the scientific exposition of human conduct directed by reason and faith.

Jone and Adelman's work classed Moral Theology into three orders of study: the doctrine on First Principles, doctrine on the Commandments and the doctrine on the Sacraments.

First Principles consider the intentions and conditions which must be a part of every action in order to contribute to the supernatural end of man. First Principles are broken down into the remote or objective norms of moral action and the proximate or subjective norms of moral action and can be more easily broken down into human and moral acts, law and conscience.

Human and moral acts are broken down into three divisions: Principles of Human Acts, the Imputability of Human Acts and Obstacles to Human Acts.

Whereas, the law is more complex and broken down into the following considerations: Law and Cognate Concepts, Legislator and Subject, Interpretation, Obligation and Observance of the Law, Cessation of Obligation, the Cessation of Laws and Privileges.

Conscience is then broken down into Concept and Division, the Binding Force of Conscience, the Formation of a Practically Certain Conscience, Sin in General and Particular Sins.

The doctrine on the Commandments focuses on the laws that all men must observe to attain to their final supernatural end and delves deeply into the individual virtues as remedies to sin against the commandments. The first three commandments pertain to the relationship of the human person to God, whereas, the final seven pertain to the relationship of the human person each with another.

And finally, the doctrine on the Sacraments pertains to the supernatural means given to man through the Sacraments of the Church which have been instituted in order that man may attain to his final supernatural end.

The sacraments are broken down into the external signs, the efficacy of the sacraments, the minister of the sacraments - including the requirements for a valid administration and the obligations of the minister, the recipient of the sacrament and the individual sacraments and their supernatural purpose.

Those seven sacraments include Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Holy Orders, Matrimony and Anointing of the Sick.

What is Mystical Theology?

The Science of the Mystics

Catholicism contains within it a very well-defined mystical theology which has arisen from the life of the mystical saints.

In the spiritual life of a mystic, there are said to be three ways or three paths which are eventually followed by any true seer. These include the purgative way, the illuminative way and the way of union.

Mystical Theology Classified Under Moral Theology

Although Mystical Theology is classed under a subdivision of Moral Theology and often associated with Ascetical Theology, it really falls under its own classification. According to the strict definition of Mystical Theology, there are two classes which fall below it. These include what is referred to as 'doctrinal' and 'experimental.'

Mystical Theology has been gleaned from the writings of the great mystic saints. Among them are included St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Catherine of Siena and the earliest, Pseudo-Dionysius

the Areopagite. All of their writings contain the highest teachings of Mystical Theology and form the basis for the syncretized methods contained in texts of higher learning.

Some of the most authoritative works on Mystical Theology include the more well-known and modern works such as *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, by Father Garrigou Lagrange and *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, by Father Adolphe Tanquerry. But historically, the texts considered most authoritative for the use of spiritual directors and priests were the *Sancta Sophia*, by Fr. F. Baker, *Institutiones Theologiae Mysticae*, by Fr. F. Schram and *Directorium Mysticum*, by Fr. F. Scaramelli.

The Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive Ways

Mystical Theology lays out a practical guide for those called to mystical life of the stages normally undergone while a soul endeavors upon the mystical way.

The purgative way involves the recognition of interior faults and vices and the purification of one's thinking.

During the illuminative way, the soul often experiences lofty visions of God and heaven, learning much about the highest levels of light and service to God.

But in the unitive way, a soul is often bereft of spiritual consolation. They will sometimes undergo what is termed a 'dark night of the soul' where the presence of God feels as though withdrawn. However, it is in these times (according to mystical theology) wherein the deepest union with God is beginning to take place.

Mystical Theology is commonly defined as the pure knowledge of God obtained through direct contact with the divine. This can come through what are termed 'obscure lights' or 'luminous darkness.'

The Ascent of Mt. Carmel, by St. John of the Cross forms the basis for much of what is contained in Mystical Theology today.

What is Ascetical Theology?

The Practice of the Hermits

Ascetical theology emerged very early on in the Church when St. Anthony left the world around the year 270 A.D. to become a desert hermit and many followed him.

Much of Ascetical Theology has been derived from *The Philokalia* which is a four-volume compilation of texts written by the desert fathers from the fourth to the eighteenth century. These desert ascetics began emerging very early on as followers of the way of St. Anthony.

The Desert Fathers

According to *In the Heart of the Desert*, by John Chryssavgis, there were three kinds of ascetical desert fathers in the early centuries of the church.

The first were called to the hermit life and lived in the desert alone. The second lived what is referred to as cenobitic or communal lives in the tradition of Pachomius. And the third lived a middle way, the semi-eremitic way, started by Ammoun. These lived in small groups of two to six monastics.

The Philokalia

Popular and well-known in the Orthodox Traditions among the Catholic faith, the *Philokalia* contains some of the most profound teachings of morality and the deep contemplative life.

St. Diadochos of Photiki gives this instruction on instruction received through dreams: “The dreams which appear to the soul through God’s love are unerring criteria of its health. Such dreams do not change from one shape to another . . . but with great gentleness they approach the soul and fill it with spiritual gladness.” He goes on to explain that demonic dreams contain the opposite and fill the soul with unrest.

But much of what the Ascetical Writings concern are expressed in these words of St. Diadochos: “You should not doubt the intellect, when it begins to be strongly energized by the divine light, becomes so completely translucent that it sees its own light vividly. This takes place when the power of the soul gains control over the passions.”

Much of the writings of the *Philokalia* and other Ascetical works contain powerful instruction on the recognition and living out of the moral life within each of us.

Modern Day Ascetical Writings

Although the first writings of the Ascetical Fathers were written thus, because the practice of the secluded life has been followed by others for many years since, a modern day tradition has emerged.

Among the most famous of the modern day ascetical writings include St. Francis de Sales, author of the esteemed *Introduction to the Devout Life* and St. Alphonsus Liguori who wrote an entire series of books on Ascetical Theological subjects. Some of them contain profound instruction for the lives of priests and nuns.

The Formal Definition of Ascetical Theology

Ascetical Theology is defined as the science of virtue and perfection and the specific means by which they are achieved. But the many writings of Ascetical Theology show us that the facets and dimensions of this science are varied and vast.

The difference between Mystical and Ascetical Theology lies therein within the fact that Mystical Theology focuses more primarily on the states of prayer and union with God. Because these two paths are so intricately connected, many writers have chosen to combine their works on Ascetical and Mystical Theology bringing these practical sciences together.

Those who study Ascetical Theology, generally also study Mystical, Moral and Dogmatic Theology in order to have a wider understanding of these related theologies in the Church.

What is Dogmatic Theology?

The Speculated Truth of the Catholic Faith

Dogmatic theology can be defined as the investigation of the truths of revelation and their connection to one another.

Dogmatic theology defines the doctrines of the Catholic Church utilizing the source of their belief in scripture and tradition. Dogmatic theology will also include definitions given by the Popes and General Church Councils.

Dogmatic Theology According to St. Thomas Aquinas

Dogmatic “theology is a true science, because it uses as principles the securely founded basic truths of Divine Revelation and draws from these new knowledge (theological conclusions) by a strict scientific method and unites the whole in a closed system.” *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma (St. Thomas Aquinas)*, By Dr. Ludwig Ott

At the same time, however, dogmatic theology is considered subordinate to other sciences in that the principles thereof are not inherently evident to each individual human being. The higher sciences from

which they derive come from God which is called sacred doctrine and revealed through revelation. Therefore, dogmatic theology originates from knowledge possessed by God and the blessed of God.

Both speculative and practical in its science, St. Thomas also defines dogmatic theology the science of contemplation of God in the light of revealed divine truth. But it also goes beyond such first things as God into other created things in relation to God and the moral actions of humankind relative to the supernatural goal of heaven.

St. Thomas Aquinas also stated that dogmatic theology is the most important and transcendent of sciences. He said this was so because of the sublimity of its object, by the supreme certainty of its knowledge and by its practical purpose.

According to Franciscan Schools, dogmatic theology holds as its goal the moral perfection of man.

The Positive and Speculative Method of Dogmatic Theology

The Teaching Authority of the Catholic Church and doctrines contained within sources of Revelation, scripture and tradition, form the basis for the positive method of dogmatic theology. The purpose of this method is to defend the Church from false beliefs or conceptions about Catholic Teaching.

The speculative method of dogmatic theology, on the other hand, seeks insight into truths of the Catholic faith by inquiring and applying human reason to the aforementioned content of divine revelation.

There are four different kinds of dogmas which are defined according to their subject: general dogmas, special dogmas, pure dogmas and mixed dogmas. Here is a short understanding of the specific purpose of each dogma:

General: Fundamental Truths of Christianity

Special: Individual Truths Contained within the Fundamental Truths of Christianity

Pure: Dogmas known solely through Divine Revelation

Mixed: Dogmas known by Natural Revelation

The Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory

Origins, Beliefs, Functions and History of Purgatory

The Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory became firmly situated within the minds of Catholics in the second half of the twelfth century.

The Origins of the Doctrine of Purgatory

It is the Apocryphal book entitled *The Maccabees* that contains the integral beginnings of the doctrine of purgatory. In an obscure passage, the narrator states that it is a good thing to pray for the dead. In these few words lie the complex and fascinating origins of the doctrine of Purgatory.

What Is the Doctrine of Purgatory?

Purgatory is the intermediate state between heaven and hell where those of the dead who have not sinned greatly enough to warrant hell, but have not yet purified themselves enough in goodness to enter into heaven, go to prepare and purify themselves of sin.

According to *The Birth of Purgatory* by Jacques Le Goff, Purgatory is “an intermediary world” in which some of the dead are subjected to a trial that could be shortened by prayers and other spiritual assistance of

those still living. According to *The Divine Crucible of Purgatory* by Mother Mary of St. Austin, there are several points that are absolutely essential in the understanding of purgatory.

1. There is a Purgatory
2. The souls in Purgatory are in a state of grace, meaning that they will eventually be purified and enter into heaven
3. They suffer or undergo purifications to satisfy the justice of God for sins committed in their lives
4. The faithful on earth can shorten their time by offering prayers and the sacrifice of the Holy Mass.

St. Catherine of Genoa, a Catholic Saint and Mystic, seemed to be shown another view. The Lord said to her, "The cause of all the suffering through which you have to pass is better understood by experience than by reasoning. Yet know this: I make of the body a purgatory for the soul." She seemed to experience a purgatory on earth as was demonstrated by her own life, wherein she underwent a great deal of trials and difficulties.

In *Purgatory – Explained by the Lives and Legends of the Saints*, by Fr. F.X. Schouppe, S.J., a plethora of mystical encounters with souls from purgatory are revealed through the visions of Catholic Saints, and in this work, each incident reveals an understanding of what is required for the expiation of certain types of sin.

Why Is Purgatory so Important?

Purgatory holds such importance for humanity because it presents a third option to heaven (total holiness) and hell (total evil) - and offers a different view into the mind of God and how He works to perfect the souls of man through this intermediate world. Perhaps purgatory is best represented by *The Divine Comedy* of Dante, wherein the poet Virgil takes an imaginary journey into the Inferno (Hell), Paradisio (Heaven) and Purgatorio (Purgatory). By so doing, Virgil meets those along the path who have warranted various destinies and thereby shows us our own destiny as we identify ourselves along the way.

Negating Purgatory

Saints have described it as a place of suffering and a place of purification. In order for souls to attain to the holiness required to stand in the presence of God, acute self-examination must be undergone. Self-examination is painful yet necessary for such a high attainment to be achieved.

The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy is a Catholic Devotion given to St. Faustina Kowalska in the 1930s by Jesus Christ to completely negate the time required for souls to spend in purgatory and precipitated the institution of Divine Mercy Sunday.

St. Gertrude the Great received a prayer in which she was promised by the Lord that 1,000 souls would be released from purgatory each time it was said:

"Eternal father, I offer you the most precious blood of thy Divine Son, Jesus, in union with the Masses said throughout the world today, for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal church, those in my own home and within my family. - Amen"

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